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**COUNTRY PÍSEŇ JAKO MULTIFUNKČNÍ  
PROSTŘEDEK VÝUKY V HODINÁCH  
ANGLICKÉHO JAZYKA**

**COUNTRY SONG AS A MULTIFUNCTIONAL  
TOOL IN EFL CLASSES**

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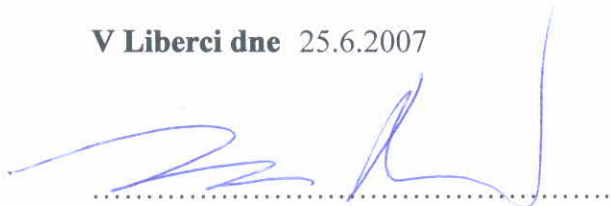
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**Úvod:** Diplomová práce zahrnuje akademický výzkum a praktické ověření návrhu využití specifického hudebního žánru, country písní, pro nácvik různorodých dovedností při výuce anglického jazyka.

**Cíl:** Cílem diplomové práce je prokázat, že náležitý výběr a zařazení country písní do hodin anglického jazyka, které respektují cíle výuky a potřeby žáků, mohou zajímavým a přitažlivým způsobem pomoci učiteli i žákům těchto cílů dosáhnout. Píseň může představovat důležitý aspekt kultury, historie, folkloru, či jazykových zvláštností dané země, je však také bohatým zdrojem nácviku gramatiky, slovní zásoby, poslechu, či čtení.

Zpracování praktického projektu, analýza a interpretace výsledků v uvedené diplomové práci prokáží porozumění metodám analýzy teoretických východisek a jejich kritického zhodnocení a schopnost využití teoretických závěrů při volbě vhodných metod při výuce cizího jazyka. Posouzení efektivnosti teorie a zvolených metodických postupů v praxi dále ukáže schopnost využití evaluace jako nezbytné strategie hodnocení celého výzkumu.

Specifikou uvedeného projektu je využití úzce vymezené oblasti hudby k zefektivnění výuky anglického jazyka.

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Datum:

Podpis

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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Last but not least, to Ruth Ellen Gruber for a string of creative ideas, advice and useful and valuable sources.

## **ANNOTATION**

The goal of the diploma thesis is to prove that country songs are an effective and multifunctional tool for teaching the English language. The work explains the importance of using songs in the learning process, describes the advantages of country songs over other music genres, suggests various methods and techniques for using songs and also offers more than 70 sample activities for teaching, practising and revising various language items as well as developing the productive and receptive skills. The hypothesis was examined by carrying out a total of 6 different projects with two groups of elementary school learners aged 11 and 14. The students effectively practised learning grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, cultural background and the four basic skills in a creative way by means of country songs.

The process of presenting the projects in English lessons, the reactions of the students and their feedback after the final project proved that country songs truly are a very powerful and universal aid in EFL classes.

## **DIE ANNOTATION**

Das Ziel der Arbeit ist zu beweisen, dass country Songs universelles und wirksames Instrument in der Lehre der englischen Sprache sind. Die Arbeit befasst sich mit der Bedeutung von Liedern in der Lehre, beschreibt die Vorteile der country Lieder im Vergleich mit anderen musikalischen Genres. Die Arbeit schlägt verschiedene Methoden und Techniken für den Einsatz von Songs vor und bietet auch mehr als 70 Aktivitäten für den Unterricht, Üben und Wiederholung verschiedener Sprachbereiche ebenso die Entwicklung der produktiven und rezeptiven Sprachfertigkeiten. Die Hypothese wurde mit sechs verschiedenen Projekten geprüft, die in der Grundschule mit zwei Klassen von Studierenden im Alter von 11 und 14 Jahren getestet wurden. Die Schüler haben die Grammatik, den Wortschatz, die Aussprache, die Realien und die

vier grundlegenden Fertigkeiten in einer kreativen Art und Weise durch country Lieder gelernt.

Der Prozess der Präsentation der Projekte im Englisch-Unterricht, die Reaktionen der Schüler und ihre Meinung nach dem endgültigen Projekt bewiesen, dass country Songs wirklich ein sehr mächtiges und universelles Instrument in dem Englisch-Unterricht sind.

## **ANOTACE**

Cílem diplomové práce je prokázat, že country písně jsou efektní a univerzální pomůckou ve výuce anglického jazyka. Práce se zabývá významem využití písní ve vyučování, popisuje výhody country písní oproti jiným hudebním žánrům, předkládá řadu technik a metod pro práci s písněmi v hodinách a rovněž nabízí více než 70 ukázkových aktivit pro výuku, procvičování a opakování různých oblastí jazyka a rozvoj produktivních a receptivních komunikačních schopností. Hypotéza byla ověřena pomocí šesti samostatných projektů, které byly vyzkoušeny na základní škole se dvěma třídami studentů ve věku 11 a 14 let. Žáci si kreativní formou zkusili výuku gramatiky, slovní zásoby, výslovnosti, reálií a čtyř základních komunikačních dovedností pomocí country písní.

Průběh prezentování projektů, reakce studentů a jejich zpětná vazba po posledním provedeném projektu potvrdil, že country písně skutečně jsou všestrannou a účinnou pomůckou ve výuce anglického jazyka.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

When teaching a foreign language, teachers should always try to make lessons more interesting for the students, because when students enjoy what they do in a lesson, they are always more motivated and they actually learn more. One of the useful tools in language teaching is a song. Since most children appreciate a particular kind of music and they listen to it in their free time, a song is a very attractive and motivating aid in the learning process. A song may be turned into many different kinds of activities for teaching, practising and revising various language items from grammar structures to vocabulary to culture to developing receptive and perceptive skills. Dealing with a song in a lesson is usually carried out as a listening activity, but it can be easily turned into a reading, writing and/or speaking activity, because the use and potential of songs and song lyrics is truly multifunctional.

Although using songs for teaching purposes is very effective, there is a particular music genre that has certain advantages over other music genres and is more suitable for using and working with at school: country music.

Thus, I prove that country songs are a very effective and multifunctional tool in the language learning process and can significantly improve English lessons. In my work I explain the reasons and importance of using songs in language teaching. I describe the typical characteristics of country songs and their advantages over other music genres in terms of classroom use. I suggest several ways for evaluating and selecting suitable songs and I also offer various sources of both song lyrics and audio tracks. I state general rules, instructions and advice for working with songs in English classes including all key aspects that should be considered before a song is used in a lesson. I describe the use of country songs individually for the listening, reading, writing and speaking skills, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and cultural background. I suggest various activities with samples for teaching, practising and revising all these skills and language features. I carried out a survey among students at several

elementary schools in order to learn about students' musical tastes and their experience of working with songs in English lessons. I prepared six detailed sample lesson plans focusing on various areas of the language, carried out these plans with elementary school learners and analyzed the findings.

Country music consists of numerous subgenres and substyles varying in moods, feels and tempos and since there is so much variety, almost anybody can find a country song they appreciate no matter what their musical tastes and preferences are (from an interview with Jo Walker-Meador, see Appendix 2.1). According to the Starcom MediaVest Group survey carried out in November 2008, two in five Americans ages 18-54 qualified themselves as country music fans. As the statistics show and as it can also be seen at most country concerts, country music is popular among people of all ages including children, which is an important premise that the songs will be attractive for the elementary school learners.

Most country songs capture a unique story and the words of the songs are usually clearly understandable, so that the listeners can hear what the song says. Clarity and comprehensibility of country songs is very useful and suitable for classroom use.

In addition, since the topics of country songs come from real life, students can understand the content of the song easily and very often they can even relate to it. When the students understand what the song is about, they can work more effectively. Teachers can also find a useful country song of a specific topic based on the actual topic that they intend to deal with or that is featured in the textbook.

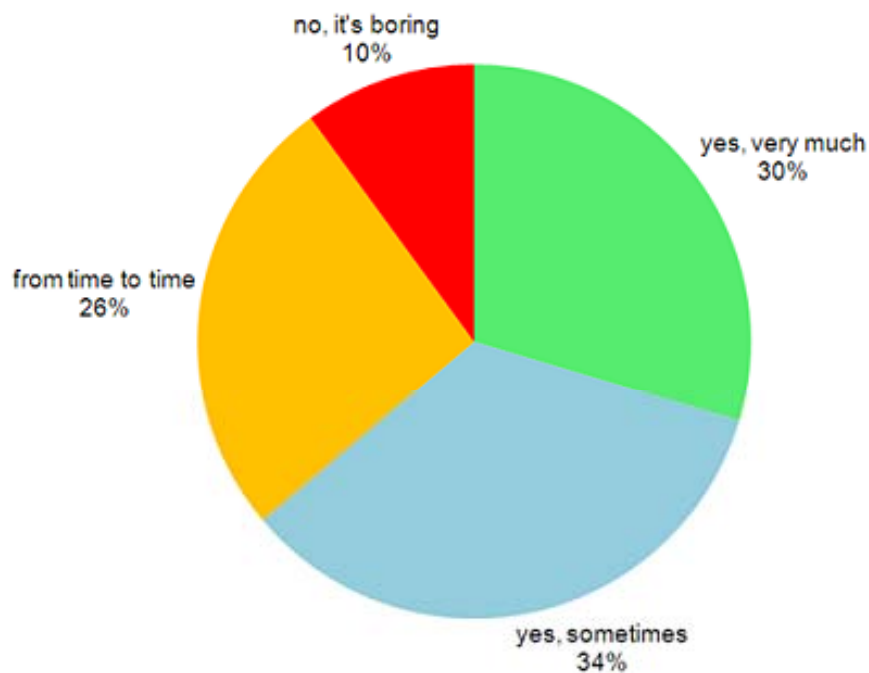
In contrast to other music genres, country music appeals to listeners of all ages, which is the reason that country songs do not contain anything which would be not suitable for young learners. Country songs do not include any offensive language and the teachers do not have to be worried that the song they choose may be inappropriate to play for children.

## **II. THEORY**

### **A. Why to Use Songs in English Classes**

A song is a very common part of life. It is usually considered to be a piece of music with words which are meant to be sung (Wehmeier, 2000:1231). From the psychological point of view, singing a song resembles the way in which small children talk, with only little concern for an addressee. They simply enjoy hearing themselves repeat (Piaget, 1923). Piaget described this as 'the egocentric language' (1923). It may seem that this egocentric language never leaves us and remains a part of life through songs we sing. Therefore, music and songs are a very natural part of human life.

Music and songs are all around us, we are in touch with it everyday. We can hear on the radio, TV, in public places such as shops, restaurants, sport clubs. "It would seem that the only place music and song is slow to catch on is in schools!" (Murphey, 1992:7). This is quite a paradox, because children represent a magnificent part of music consumers. In the survey I carried out at several elementary schools in Liberec and Jablonec nad Nisou in September 2007, 95% of the total of 200 pupils responded that they listened to music at least three times a week and 81% said they listened to it every day. When asked about listening to songs at school, 90 % of the students said they enjoyed doing that (see Figure 1). When the students were asked whether they were interested in what the songs were about and whether they would like to translate the lyrics, 74 % of them admitted so (for the complete results of the survey see Appendices 2.1-2.6). As one can see, young learners are highly interested in music and teachers should be aware of pupils' interests to motivate them and make use of their interests to motivate them in the learning process.



**FIGURE 1: Do you like listening to songs in English classes?**

Formerly, only little attention was paid to using songs at school, since they were not considered as a serious activity. As Paul explains: "In the traditional classroom, songs and games are for the end of a lesson or a reward for studying hard. They are not where the real studying takes place but are regarded as light relief. When an exam is coming up, or unit of a textbook has to be finished, it is the songs and games which are dropped. The teacher will say that there isn't time to have fun." (1996:4). However, as Paul goes on, this situation has changed through the years: "There has been an increasing tendency for songs and games to be taken seriously in the language classroom. " (1996:4). A song does not have to be separated from the learning process, but actually can be used as the main activity for both teaching and practising language structures. A belief that songs serve only as a sigh of relief does not have place in the modern classroom.

A very important thing is the feeling of enjoyment while working with a song. "The more fun a child is having while learning, and the more she feels

she is discovering things for herself, the more likely it is that she will be able to remember these words and structures, and produce them spontaneously" (Paul 1996:6). Using songs may liven up the lessons in a great way, but of course, the focus remains on the language learning. As Murphey suggests, "the use of music and song in the classroom can stimulate very positive associations to the study of a language, which otherwise may only be seen as a laborious task, entailing exams, frustration, and corrections" (1992:6). Students will effectively learn in a creative and relaxing way and they will not feel pain in order to learn.

Moreover, songs are highly memorable thanks to melody and rhymes. In spite of drilling and memorizing language structures that students may forget as soon as they leave the classroom, songs usually stick in their heads and they may recall even in their free time.

Another advantage of listening to songs in classes is that pupils meet authentic language and they can learn from natural structures. Authenticity of the songs is essential. "Children in Britain and the United States learn much of their basic English in songs and games which contain relatively uncontrolled language. It is thought that foreign language learners should experience English in much the same way." (Paul 1996:4). Many songs have been written for learning purposes, but as Papa claims, "songs specially constructed for the teaching of particular structures have failed to arouse the student's interest and have often proved to be boring and artificial" (1997:8). To keep students motivated and concentrated on learning, only real and authentic songs should be used.

A song is a universal tool and it can serve for learning or practising various aspects of the language as well as developing productive and receptive skills. If students are supposed to practise pronunciation, they may look for particular sound patterns or play with rhymes. If they are about to deal with a specific grammatical structure, they may look for occurrences of various forms of verbs. The teacher can also use a song as a source of a topic or a theme for the

follow-up discussion. The range of activities is truly large as well as the number of skills that can be practised by means of songs. Changing various kinds of activities within a lesson is also important for keeping students concentrated. "Variety is especially important for younger students, who often have very little internal motivation for entering a language classroom" (Hancock, 1998:7). When a teacher prepares a lesson plan, they have to consider as many different activities as possible, so that the students do not get bored. "We have to think about activities which the students do before and after this study session so that we do not simply repeat the same kind of activity again and again. We need to offer a varied diet of exercises when studying language forms both because all our students have different learning styles and also to help sustain student motivation" (Harmer, 2001:158).

No matter what area of the language students are supposed to learn or practise by means of a particular song, they always develop and improve their listening skills. Since songs are authentic, most of the time students listen to a song, they listen to a native speaker, which is tremendously important in the language learning process. Besides listening skills, students develop and improve other skills as well (see page 32).

"Songs in general also use simple, conversational language with a lot of repetition, which is just what many language teachers look for in sample texts" (Murphey, 1992:7). The fact that songs include a lot of repetition and many language items occur multiple times within a song (e.g. in choruses), represent a great benefit for songs as teaching tools. Teachers may choose a song which includes a sufficient amount of occurrences of a specific language item that the teachers intend to practise.

Songs have been a part of the learning process for many years, but in the age of the Internet the potential of songs is even higher. Today it is no problem to easily find any song lyric and also legally buy an album or even a single song for a minimal price on the Internet. If a teacher knows a perfect song they

might use in a lesson, there are absolutely no boundaries to get the lyrics as well as the song itself (see page 28).

No matter how usefully songs may serve in a lesson, some teachers still seem to be concerned and reluctant to start using songs at school. Some of them are worried that listening to music in a classroom would disturb neighbouring classes. It may be true, however, this is the problem of all listening tasks, which are inevitable in the learning process. If teachers normally perform listening activities in a class, listening to songs would not do much worse. Some teachers also complain that students might get too excited and not concentrate on learning, but as Macias explains, this kind of student reaction is actually advantageous. "It is true that music and song may cause excitement to some students, but in a positive way: breaking the usual routine, increasing their motivation, giving them intensive practice in selected patterns without boredom" (2008). She also disproves another typical concern that songs do not follow a syllabus: "It is perfectly possible to follow a syllabus, substituting some book activities with music and song activities that contain the same patterns or structures" (2008). Basically any skill or language item or structure can be effectively practised by means of songs (see Methodology, page 32).

Additionally, some teachers tend to omit songs in textbooks, because they are afraid that they would have to sing. Since most song activities do not actually require singing the song, this reason for skipping a song in the textbook is truly ridiculous and good for nothing. There are many ways of practising language structures and language skills without singing a song.

Songs are a very universal tool in the language process, because they represent simple natural language. Songs are highly memorable and include a lot of repetition, which is useful for practising specific language structures. Using songs in English classes liven up the lesson and students are highly motivated for learning.



## **B. Why to Use Country Songs**

Undoubtedly, a song is a powerful tool in the process of learning any foreign language. It enables teachers to have a variety of activities for students to practise and listening to songs is very likeable and enjoyable for everybody. Students are motivated and are able to learn and remember more.

Using country songs in English lessons enables many more activities to be used and the learning process becomes more effective and attractive. The range of suitable activities is even wider with country songs, which have an even greater potential and numerous advantages over other popular music genres such as pop, rock, hip hop or rap. "No genre of music deals with a more diverse body of subject matter, provides a more mature perspective, or draws from a wider range of conflicting impulses than country" (Randall, 2006:13).

An exclusive use of country songs for teaching English as a second language is not a new idea, but there actually are some schools in the world, where country songs are used this way. In August 2008 I interviewed Jo Walker-Meador, who worked as an Executive Director of the Country Music Association from 1962 to 1991, and she spoke about a contest for people to write essays about why they loved country music, which was run by the radio show Voice of America several years ago. The winner of the contest was from Shanghai and he came to Nashville with his professor and said that it was the way there were learning English in China, listening to country music songs (for the complete interview see Appendix 2.1). It is very likely that somewhere in the world country songs are being used for teaching English in the very same way.

### **1) Typical Characteristics of the Genre**

Country music is a unique style which features a variety of sub styles and moods in it. There are slow love songs, up-tempo party songs, tearful ballads, melodic country pop songs, drinking honky tonk songs, instrumental

compositions, country rock, country beat, western swing, just to name a few kinds. Besides that there are styles which historically developed and separated from the mainstream country music. Among them there is especially bluegrass, which developed from country in the early 1940's and rock'n'roll in the mid 1950's. Everybody can find country music that they might like and enjoy and that is why this genre is popular among masses: "If your mind is open to all types of music then anybody could like country music. They might not like all of it, but they can certainly like and appreciate some of it, because there is so much talent. Some people happen to take to it certainly more quickly than others but I like it because there's variety of music" (from the interview with Jo Walker-Meador, Appendix 2.1).

The fact that country music is so widely popular is very advantageous for the classroom use, because teachers can expect that their pupils are likely to enjoy the songs and get involved with the songs-related activities.

Popularity of the country music genre has extremely increased over the past 20 years thanks to new acts such as Garth Brooks and Shania Twain, who appealed to young audiences and attracted a brand new generation of listeners. To illustrate this progress, I compare findings on music demographics by Jimmie N. Rogers from 1989 to a new research carried out by the Starcom MediaVest Group in November 2008. Rogers claims, that "most investigators agree that the audience is almost exclusively white and in the 25-49 age group" (1989:216). He adds that teenagers usually appreciate rock music and people over fifty do not appreciate any particular music genre. This situation has rapidly changed since 1989 and country music is universal music for everybody today. The Starcom MediaVest Group conducted a new survey among over 13.000 radio listeners in November 2008 in order to monitor demographics of music audiences and found out that "roughly two in five American adults ages 18-54 qualified themselves as country music fans. 5% of Americans considered themselves as 'countryphiles'" As one can see, country music has become a major music genre and it is appreciated by all people of all

ages, as it can be seen at every single show not only in the USA but also in Europe. In the audience of almost every concert there are small children, teenagers, middle-aged adults and old people, too. This is very unique and very different from other genres, where a particular style is usually appreciated among people of a certain age; for instance, most children listen to teenage pop stars, adult men around 40 enjoy classic rock and big beat from the 70's, older people prefer brass or classical music, etc. Country music is music for all people. It comes as no surprise that the best selling solo artist in the American album history is the country singer Garth Brooks with more than 123 million albums sold, followed by Elvis Presley with 118,5 million units (according to the Recording Industry Association of America, November 2007). According to Nielsen SoundScan, a company which has been monitoring record sales since 1991, there are five country artists in the list of the ten best-selling artists in the past 17 years. Since country music is so popular among people of all ages, there is no doubt that the young learners will like the songs as well.

Popularity of country songs is a very significant factor in the language learning process, because students get more involved when they enjoy a song which is used within a lesson, and it stimulates them to be more motivated. "If a child is singing something she really enjoys, and suddenly encounters a word or structure she doesn't know, but which she feels she needs in order to sing successfully, she will feel an emotional need to learn. Perhaps our most important role as teachers is to put children in these kind of situations. We choose the language targets, but we don't teach them. We design songs so that the children will discover these targets while they are singing" (Paul, 1996:7).

A great advantage of songs is their omnipresence. Students will take them out of the classroom and recall them even in their free time for their own pleasure. "Songs are unforgettable. Unlike drills, which usually slip from students minds as soon as they leave the classroom, songs can last a lifetime and become part of one's own culture" (Papa, 1979:8). It may seem that country music and country songs are even more timeless. When there is a

country hit on the radio, most people are usually able to recall the song for a long time. Many country hits become evergreens and they get played for many years and not only for a limited time until the single disappears from the charts. This is another difference from pop or rock, which is rather fashion-oriented, the trend changes every week and most people may not recall songs that were on pop charts a couple of years or even months ago. When a teacher builds up a teaching activity based on a country song, they can be sure they will be able to use it for many years and the activity will not be outdated.

## **2) Typical Characteristics of Country Music Lyrics**

### **a) Suitable Lyrics**

The importance of country music lyrics is remarkable. Country songs tell stories and therefore the words must be clearly understandable, so the listeners can understand what the song says. For example, there is no singing and loud music at one time in any good country song. There is usually singing and some background music alternating with instrumental breaks and solos.

This is different from numerous rock or pop bands whose songs are not easy or not even possible to understand at all. Many teachers complain that sometimes it is hard to find a song with clear lyrics because of the reasons stated above.

This is not a problem of country songs, where the words and content of the song is essential. Randy Travis, a country music legend, once said: "There are records going out there and I'm listening and I'm saying 'What the heck did they just say?' I can't understand it, because the words are drowned by whatever else is surrounding it on the record. It just drives me up the wall to listen to stuff like that" ("20 Questions with Randy Travis, CMT.com, November 8th, 2004). Similarly to Travis, Jo Walker-Meador also emphasized

the importance of clear understanding and said that she did not like a song if she could not understand what the song was about (Appendix 2.1).

When a country song is used in an English lesson, the teacher must be sure that children understand the song clearly. There would be no point in playing a song in the classroom where the students are not able hear what the singer is singing. As Paul points out, "we want children to encounter language in an achievable sequence, so it will make sense to them, and so they have the confidence to use it with creativity and flexibility" (1996:5).

If the students do not understand the words of a certain song, they cannot learn and such activity loses its purpose within a lesson. Therefore, only clear songs should be used for educational purposes. Even though most country songs fulfill this condition, teachers should still pay attention and consider comprehensibility of each song they intend to use.

#### **b) Three Chords and the Truth**

Many teachers complain that many songs are not appropriate to listen to at school, because they contain offensive language. Of course, this is true especially for rap or rock music, but definitely not for country. This is given not only by the fact that country music is music for people of all ages, but mostly by the universal topics that come out of the songs.

Country songs are well-known for their honesty and everyday topics. We all live country songs. When I interviewed Jo Walker-Meador and asked her about the topics of country songs, she talked about themes about "love and lack of love", she said that the songs were about what happens in life, how people live and she emphasized that people can relate to these songs, because they are about life (see Appendix 2.1). Most common themes of country songs are very well listed in the song "Songs About Me" by Trace Adkins: "these are songs about me and who I am. Songs about lovin' and livin' and good-hearted women and family and God" (Smith & Hill, 2005). Rogers examined frequency of

topics in country songs and found out that "nearly three of every four popular country songs are about love, a significant number can be described as songs about 'living' - how a person wishes to live, is living, or plans to live." (1989:10). In a study conducted by the Starcom MediaVest Group in November 2008, country fans described the topics of the genre as "life relevance, real stories, universal truths and family appeal." Additionally, there is a common saying which refers to country songs as 'three chords and the truth.'

All the themes of country songs listed above were gathered by people who listen to country. However, I have witnessed a lot of prejudice among people who do not listen to country music and many of these people believe that country songs are only about horses, being in prison and death. Needless to say, there were some dark times in the history of country music when people might have felt this. By the end of the 1970's country music found itself in a dead end, recovering from a major influence of pop music in the mid 1970's, which greatly changed the sound of mainstream country music. Artists were looking hard for good songs and at that time some songs with somewhat weak lyrics were recorded, for instance "You're the Reason Our Kids Are So Ugly" (by Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty, 1973). In the early 1980's this situation rapidly changed with New Traditionalism, a brand new stream in country music, which represented a return to tradition with fresh sound. The quality standard of country songs got reinforced again and not only because of a strong competition. These days there is even more competition in the music business and only very good songs have a chance to attract listeners' attention. The claim that country songs are usually depressive about jail and death is nothing but prejudice and it is definitely not true anymore. Alan Jackson, who is widely considered as the finest current poet in country music, is being compared to Ernest Hemingway and his song lyrics are the subject of study at several universities in the USA.

The fact that the themes of country music come from real life and most people can relate to these songs is very useful for the use of these songs in a classroom. Country songs are easy to understand and pupils are able to understand and relate to the events in the songs. Teachers can choose a song of a specific topic and bring it to the class according to what topic they actually deal with or what the current social issues are. A country lyrics makes a country song a very powerful tool in EFL classes.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

#### **A. General Rules for the Choice and Use of Country Music**

##### **1) Learner's Age**

When using songs in English lessons, it is very important to choose appropriate songs according to the age of the pupils. In contrast to pop or rock songs, basically any country song is applicable for pupils of all ages, because they do not contain either any offensive language or inappropriate themes such as violence, drugs, sexism and racism, which occur in other music genres very often. What the teacher should consider about the theme of the song is its complexity. If the teacher wants to discuss the content of the song with the pupils, they should make sure the pupils are completely familiar with the theme and they understand it. Therefore teachers should use songs with simple topics (e.g. family, animals, jobs) with young learners and more complex songs (e.g. which are talking about faith, moral issues or death) with older learners. As Paul warns, teachers should be aware of the fact that "foreign language students are generally much older than native children with the same level of English. Songs and games designed for the American pre-schooler will often be too young for the foreign language learner, and those designed for American children will usually contain language which is too difficult" (1996:5).

Therefore, the teacher should always consider each particular song they intend to use with a particular group of learners.

However, the content of the song is not the only area to be considered. Also the tempo of the song plays an important part, because up-tempo songs are usually harder to follow and especially younger learners may find it difficult to catch up all the words. For this reason, teachers should pay attention to the tempo and try to use slower songs with young learners and always make sure that the song is not too fast to follow.

In case that teaching new vocabulary is not the primary reason for which the song is played in the lesson, teachers should check whether the song does not contain too much unknown vocabulary, so the pupils are not disturbed with so many new words and they can focus on the primary goal of the activity.

## **2) Level of English**

All songs that are considered to be played for pupils should be at an adequate level for their language knowledge. For instance, learners who are dealing with Past Simple and Past Continuous for the first time in their lives are for obvious reasons not able to understand a song which features Past Perfect. The teachers should make sure that the song uses appropriate grammar features and adequate vocabulary, so the pupils can understand. "Songs and games which contain language which is too difficult, or doesn't fit, force the children to memorize. They stop thinking and start parroting. If we have these children to have the confidence to be active learners of English we must carefully regulate the amount of uncontrolled language in songs and games in the early stages. We can gradually increase the amount of uncontrolled language as they gain confidence" (Paul, 1996:7). Therefore, teachers should always check the amount of new vocabulary and complex grammar features.

In addition, clear pronunciation is also very important, but there are no concerns necessary with country songs, whose lyrics are mostly very clear to



understand, since the basic principle of these songs is that they tell a story and listeners are supposed to hear what the songs say. Naturally, some songs are clearer to understand than others and the teacher should be sure that the song is clear enough for the pupils to understand.

It is not necessary to use a specific song for only one level. "In many cases, the song could be adapted for a different level. This would involve the teacher making their own activity or song sheet" (Hancock, 1998:12).

### **3) Focus on the Language Item**

Every country song that is used for teaching should contain a sufficient amount of items that the teacher wants to practise. If the goal of the lesson is a revision of modal verbs, the song should contain as many modal verbs as possible and no other feature which would be more dominant than modals. If a song is supposed to open a discussion on animals, it should not contain too many grammar items that are new for the pupils. The teacher should be always sure that the song effectively covers what they want to practise.

Another important point is to keep working with the language items as the primary goal of the activity. If the children just listen and have fun and not actually learn the language, it is only a waste of precious time within a lesson. Teachers must be sure that the activity is still effective and the children still work with the language. "The best songs are those in which language can continue to develop for some time. Once language can no longer develop, the song should no longer be used" (Paul, 1996:8)

For these reasons, it is very important to choose an appropriate song that features a sufficient number of language structures that the teacher intends to practise in the classroom (for the choice of songs see page 28).

#### **4) Attractivity**

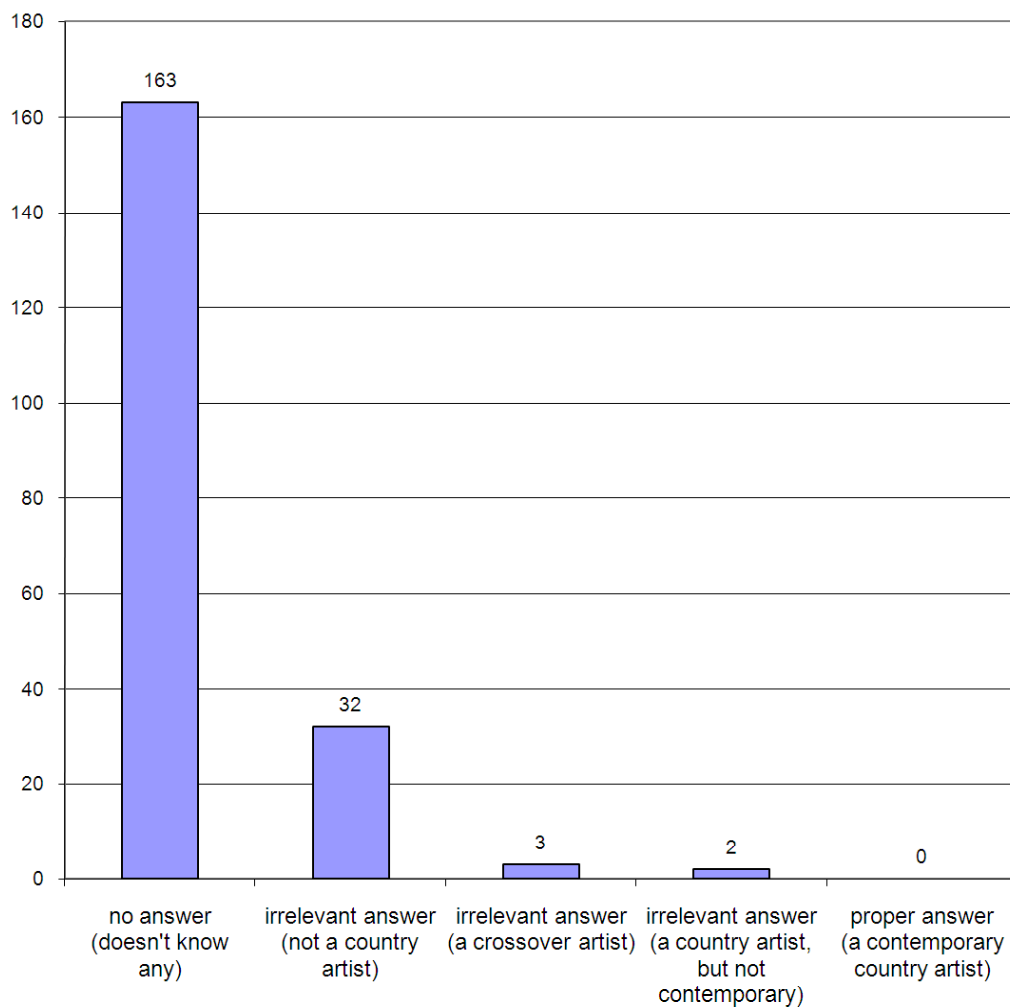
Since motivation is one of the key elements in the language learning process, the song should always be interesting and working with the song should be as enjoyable for the pupils as possible. Students learn and remember more if they like what they do. According to the statistics gathered by the National Training Laboratories in Maine, students remember only 5% of what they hear, 10% of what they see, 20% of they hear and see, 50% of what they talk about and 75% of what they do (Mortensen, 1993:29). Thus, involment of the students is extremely important in order to teach them as much as possible. Listening to songs itself is very enjoyable and since most country songs are very catchy thanks to a unique story in each song, and this brings another advantage to the use of country songs in EFL classes.

Sometimes it happens that some students start giggling when a song starts playing. As Hancock explains: "Perhaps they like another kind of music and they do not want their classmates to think they identify with this kind. One way to get around this problem is not to present the song as something they are supposed to like" (1998:9). Teachers should not be concerned that students have different music tastes and they may not like the song that is played in the lesson. "Just because a student might not choose to listen to a certain song outside the classroom, it does not mean that the student would not enjoy it as part of a learning activity" (Hancock: 1998:7). From my own experience students usually welcome any activity that differs from their regular school work and they can enjoy any kind of songs.

In addition, teachers should be aware that Czech students may have a different idea about what country music is due to a lack of contemporary country music and the typical misunderstanding of the genre in the Czech Republic. A lot of people listen to country music in the Czech Republic, and, as Ruth Ellen Gruber claimed in the interview on the radio station Český Rozhlas 7, a lot of fans and experts in Europe only listen to American country music, rejecting any kind of local production. She also mentioned the Czech

Republic and Germany, where local societies developed their own country music, which is sung in the local language for a local audience. (Richter, 2009). From my own experience, both American and Czech country music is appreciated by young people, adults and older generation, but not by elementary school children. This is caused by the fact, that the only TV programme, Country Express Praha-Nashville, was cancelled in 2000 and since then country music has been ignored by Czech TV stations over the past 9 years. Additionally, there are very few country radio stations and almost no American country artists tour in the Czech Republic, so that today's children have not been given any chance to get in touch with contemporary country music. For this reason, children usually confuse country music with tramp music, which is locally often called country music. I carried out a survey among 200 elementary schools students and asked them about some of the names of contemporary American country music artists. Their answers confirmed my assumptions as I did not receive a single relevant answer (see Figure 2).

82% of the students did not know any country artist at all and 16% filled in irrelevant names such Justin Timberlake, Britney Spears or 50 Cent, which shows that the students do not have the slightest idea about what country music is. Three students wrote names of crossover artists Miley Cyrus, whose name occurred twice, and Jimmy Buffett. Only two students filled in names of country artists Johnny Cash and Loretta Lynn (both names misspelled), however, they were required to fill in contemporary artists, in which they failed. As a part of the survey, the students were asked to write down their favorite music genres. Surprisingly, even the students who marked country as the only genre they listened to were not able to fill in any American country artist. They probably listened to Czech country music or maybe they listened also to American production but did not know any names (for the complete results of the survey see Appendices 1.2-1.6).



**FIGURE 2: Do you know any contemporary American country artist?**

However, the fact that students do not know country music does not cause any obstacle for using country songs at Czech elementary schools, since the students can enjoy the songs no matter what their favorite music genre is.

### **5) Timing in a lesson**

Listening to a song is very useful at any stage of the lesson, it only depends on the purpose of the activity. Grenough recommends using a song as a perfect

heating up activity at the beginning, a lively way to freshen students up in the middle of a lesson as well as an enjoyable way to close the lesson (1994). Since a song is not used as an isolated activity in the modern classroom but is taken more seriously and more often plays the central role in the language learning process (Paul, 1996:4), using the song within a lesson depends on a particular lesson plan in which the activity involving a song is included.

Additionally, teachers may also have a 5-minute activity involving a song prepared by hand everytime they have some spare time left at the end of the lesson. Of course, a song may be used for a full-length lesson, too. Griffie also mentions "using a song for special occasions such as Christmas or when the textbook has no unit on a subject" (1992:5) .

## **6) Choice and Source of Song Lyrics**

In recent years the access to song lyrics has become impressively easy and the supply of songs absolutely inexhaustable. With hundreds of websites dedicated to song lyrics, finding a particular song has never been easier. If the teacher knows the exact title of the song they want to use, they may type the song title in quotation marks together with the keyword "*lyrics*" in a search engine and get and a list of direct links to the songs lyrics at various locations.

If the teacher does not have a specific song in mind and they want to browse more songs to choose from, the basic criterion depends on the purpose of the activity. If the teacher wants to teach particular grammar features, they need to look for songs according to their grammar structures. If their aim is to teach vocabulary or discuss topics that come out of the songs, they need to look for songs according to their content. I list three different ways of choosing suitable song lyrics:

Firstly, in the Appendix there is list of recommended country songs for classroom use. I grouped the songs by their themes, so the teachers can pick a specific song based on the topic they intend to deal with.

Secondly, there are numerous websites on the Internet focusing on country music lyrics. Teachers can browse the lyrics very easily and find the ones they like to use.

[www.cmt.com/music/lyrics](http://www.cmt.com/music/lyrics)

[www.cowboylyrics.com](http://www.cowboylyrics.com)

[www.anycountrymusiclyrics.com](http://www.anycountrymusiclyrics.com)

[www.hit-country-music-lyrics.com](http://www.hit-country-music-lyrics.com)

[www.goodwinmusic.com/lyrics.html](http://www.goodwinmusic.com/lyrics.html)

However, any search engine can help find the right song, the key to success is to define the right search keywords. In case that the teacher wants to focus on the content of country songs, they should type *"country music" lyrics* (with quotation marks) and add a couple of keywords that are supposed to be included in the song (e.g. *car, gas, tank*). The search demand may look like this: *"country music" lyrics car gas tank*, after which the search engine returns a list of songs including the desired words: "Uneasy Rider" by Charlie Daniels, "The Road You Leave Behind" by David Lee Murphy, "New Strings" by Miranda Lambert. In case of grammar the teacher needs to submit demanded grammar features in quotation marks, for example: *"country music" lyrics "has been" "has made"*.

I do not recommend to choose the very first song that is returned by the search engine. Teachers should browse more songs and find the ones they consider the most suitable for their purpose.

Once a teacher selected a song for classroom use, they should evaluate the song in terms of its suitability and make sure the song is very appropriate for their intended use. In order to evaluate the song effectively, I enclose an assessment sheet for rating songs (see Appendix 10.1), so that the teacher can see whether their song fulfills the requirements.

## **7) Source of songs**

When the teacher has found a suitable song lyric for classroom use, they need to get the song itself. Finding a full-length audio version of a particular song may seem more complicated than finding lyrics. However, there are still a couple of ways to legally get a song without the necessity of purchasing the CD. I suggest iTunes ([www.itunes.com](http://www.itunes.com)), where any single song may be purchased for 0.99 USD. Moreover, there are audio previews of all songs, so the teacher is also able to check the tempo of each song before placing the purchase. After sending the payment the song may be downloaded into the PC, burned on an audio CD and played in the classroom.

Caution: downloading or transferring music without proper permission or payment is illegal and punishable by law. I strongly recommend the teachers to use only songs they legally purchased on an album or digital downloads.

## **B. General Rules for Using a Song in a Classroom**

Even though there is a huge number of activities for teaching and/or practising many different skills and language items, a few general rules for dealing with songs in a lesson can be given. Papa suggests this general performing scheme:

- a) Give a brief account of the theme or story of the song in the students' own language.
- b) Play the recorded version of the song.
- c) Comprehension questions can be asked at this stage to make sure that the gist of the meaning has been grasped.
- d) Read the song and explain the unfamiliar structural and lexical items. Also practise the pronunciation of unfamiliar words.
- e) The students listen again to the recorded song.
- f) The teacher reads the song line by line, and the students repeat in chorus, in groups and individually.

- g) Play the song again and invite students to sing. It often helps if the teacher sings and encourages all the students to join in.

(1979:8)

Naturally, these are very general rules which can be adapted according to the level and age of the students as well as the type and purpose of the activity. I do not recommend to talk about the song in the students' own language at pre-intermediate level and above. I also do not think it is necessary to read the song line by line unless the song is not being presented to small children. Many teachers prefer not to sing in front of the classroom, however, it is a great advantage if the teacher actually is musically gifted and encourages the students to sing along. Rynt also proposes to announce the title of the song as well as the original performer (1996:6). Not only does the teacher acknowledge the artist, but knowing the song title and the artist is very useful for the students who like the song and may want to get it for their own pleasure.

### **C. Particular Areas of the Language to Be Taught by Means of Country Songs**

#### **1. Four Basic Skills**

There are many ways of practising and developing the productive and receptive skills by means of country songs. Most activities involve practising multiple skills at one time, thus "it is difficult and rather unnatural to take the activities and separate them into conventional categories of reading, writing, speaking and listening, since we often exercise several of these skills at once" (Murphey, 1998:69). For this reason I suggest activities in each chapter in which developing a particular skill is the primary goal even though practising additional skills is also involved.



### **a) Listening**

Listening is one of the fundamental skills and there is no doubt that it needs to be taught very carefully. As Weaver points out, "listening is used far more than (sic) any other single language skill in normal daily life. On average, we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read and five times more than we write" (1972). As one can see, the ability to understand properly is the key condition to successful communication with English speakers. Listening to country songs is a great way to practise listening skills, because these skills are actually actively practised every single time when a song is being worked with in a lesson.

Morley states three main principles of listening – relevance, transferability/applicability and task orientation (1991:90). Firstly, as she explains, activities practising listening skills must be relevant to a learner's life and life-style and they must appeal to students, so that learners' ears are really tuned in. Since the topics of country songs come from real life and students can relate to them, it makes the country music songs a perfect tool in the learning process.

Secondly, Morley emphasizes the transferability/applicability value, that is that students can make use of what they learned both internally (e.g. to other classes) or externally (e.g. out of school) (1991:91). Country songs are, as most songs, highly memorable and next there is the "stuck-in-head phenomenon" and many students are able to recall those songs even in their free time. Additionally, when they listen to their own favorite songs or read lyrics of their favorite songs, they may recognize the structures and patterns they were dealing with in the language classes and discover them for themselves.

Thirdly, Morley talks about task orientation and distinguishes between working with the content of the listening and language analysis (1991:91). Listening to country songs enables many different types of activities involving language work (e.g. grammar structures, vocabulary) as well as dealing with the content (e.g. discussing the story within a song).

Even though country songs are a perfect tool for practising listening skills, they cannot replace real communication and peer-to-peer interaction when the learners just listen and do not talk to other persons. However, listening to country songs can improve comprehension and the basic purpose of listening activities, which is "to help learners develop listening as a skill in its own right in order to understand the meaning of spoken language quickly and accurately, comfortably and confidently, in a variety of settings." (Morley, 1991:83). In addition, Pimsler & Quinn add one more goal of listening activities, which is also perfectly fulfilled by using country songs: "a desire to bring students into closer contact with real language as it is used in the real world by people communicating successfully with each other" (1971). Country songs contain natural language, which is essential in language classes, because as Papa points out, "songs specially constructed for the teaching of particular structures have failed to arouse the student's interest and have often proved to be boring and artificial" (1997:8).

Naturally, when a listening activity is used in a lesson, the teacher should always follow the basic stages of listening: pre-listening introduction (e.g. discussion, looking at pictures), pre-task work (e.g. prediction, pre-teaching vocabulary), setting a clear task, listening for gist, feedback, listening for detail, conclusion (e.g. review, follow-up activities) (Scrivener, 2005:174).

Since the listening skills are intensively and actively practised during all activities involving listening to country songs in a lesson, I do not deal with activities whose purpose is improving listening skills only. There is so much power and potential in working with songs that focusing on one goal may be considered a waste of time. Indeed, a huge amount of various skills and techniques can be practised besides listening. However, improving the listening skills is often the only goal of working with songs in regular textbooks.

## **b) Reading**

The basic aim of reading is to present a text to students as a logical and meaningful unit which they can read and understand its content. "Of all the skills that the child must acquire in school, reading is the most complex and difficult. The child who accurately and efficiently translates a string of printed letters into meaningful communication may appear to be accomplishing that task with little mental effort. In fact, however, the child is engaging in complex interactive processes that are dependent on multiple subskills and an enormous amount of coded information" (McLaughlin, 1987:59). Reading comprehension can be practised by means of country songs in a great way. When a song lyric is being worked with in a classroom and students deal with its content, they always improve their reading skills. There is a vast amount of activities available when students read a song lyric, e.g. they discuss the topics that come out of the songs, speak about their own experience on the topic, develop the story of the song, discuss what they can read between the lines, learn unknown vocabulary in context or learn about the culture of the country where the song comes from.

Needless to say, reading comprehension is not practised in the case that the content of the song is not the focus. If students work with the structure of the song lyrics in order to practise specific grammar features, pronunciation, stress pattern or other language items, they do not practise their reading skills. However, a big number of activities may be used for improving reading comprehension.

Moreover, in 100% of cases when students read song lyrics, they practise spelling. When students follow the text as they listen to a song or when they read the lyrics when working on their own, they always see the written form of English words and phrases and their sense of correct spelling is being unconsciously refined.

In addition, when reading a song lyric aloud, reading goes hand in hand with pronunciation. Many teachers encourage their students to read texts aloud.

"The thought is that once learners are able to sound out the letters, they will be able to read the words, and then, once they are able to read the words, they will be able to make meaning of the text" (Hawkins, 1991:170). When students read aloud, they perceive the text also in a sonic way, which may help understand the content better. However, Serpell points out a risk of misunderstanding, claiming that "students misread and misinterpret words containing sounds which they cannot discriminate. That is, if they cannot hear the difference between /r/ and /l/, they may read 'light' for 'right', 'cloud' for 'crowd'. The sound discrimination problem may cause a temporary slowdown in comprehension, but it does not always mean that misunderstanding will take place" (1968). Reading country song lyrics is an ideal way to practise pronunciation, because there are many rhymes which contain minimal pairs and similarly sounding words. For activities focusing on improving pronunciation, see page 53.

Similarly to the listening skills, the reading skills can be improved by many types of different activities. For this reason, developing the reading skills does not require to be the primary goal of the activity in many cases, because it is practised always when the content of the song is being dealt with. I describe only a few separate activities focusing on reading comprehension in this chapter, because reading comprehension is integrated in many other activities in a more complex frame. I suggest these activities as examples:

### **1) The Cloze Passage**

Students get a song lyric with some erased words (e.g. every 6th word is missing). Students complete the missing words according to the context and by guessing what the author might have used. More options are possible and the teacher has to evaluate each word that the students write. The song is played to show 'recommended options' rather than to show the only possible answers.

## **2) Comprehension**

Students read through a song lyric and then evaluate statements about the song whether the statements are true or false.

### **Sample**

The students listen to the song "Roll On (Eighteen Wheeler)" by Alabama and decide whether the following statements are true or false.

- The man in the song drives a bus. YES-NO
- He had an accident and crashed into a truck. YES-NO
- He ran away because he was scared. YES-NO
- The police were looking for him in many places. YES-NO
- His family went out to look for him, too. YES-NO
- He never returned home. YES-NO

For the lyric of the song "Roll On (Eighteen Wheeler)" see Appendix 9.6.

## **3) Mixed Lines/Verses**

Students get a song lyric with mixed lines within verses or mixed verses within a song. They need to rearrange the lines/verses in order to make the song meaningful.

### **c) Speaking**

Country songs are a powerful tool also for improving speaking skills. Practising speaking and encouraging students to speak is extremely important for students of all levels, however, in the past this skill was rather underestimated. As Richards & Rogers explain, the situation has changed and today's learners are considered successful if they are able to effectively communicate in their second language (1987). "The goal of a speaking

component in a language class should be to encourage the acquisition of communication skills in and out of the classroom" (Riggenbach, 1991:126).

When teaching speaking, two major areas have to be covered: accuracy and fluency. Formerly, the focus was rather on accuracy at an early stage of language teaching. Higgs & Clifford warn that "forcing communication too early without any regard for accuracy may result in early fossilization" (1982), but on the other hand, other instructors believe that teaching grammar is possible through communicative means (Celce-Murcia & Hilles, 1988). Either way, teachers should pay attention to both accuracy and fluency and practise them at an adequate level. Especially for lower levels "a linguistic grammar base may be necessary before fluency can be attained " (Riggenbach, 1991:126). Therefore, young learners should get some knowledge on grammar first, and then start practising fluency in order to "develop a pattern of language interaction within the classroom which is as close as possible to that used by competent performers in normal life" (Brumfit, 1984:69).

The amount of practising this particular skill tends to be lacking at elementary schools very often, because there are usually too many students in a class, so they cannot all speak efficiently within a lesson. Listening to country songs gives enough opportunities to speak. Students may speak either whether they like or dislike a certain song and what their opinion on the song is, but it is even more efficient to discuss the topic that comes out of the song. Students may discuss their views in pairs or small groups and then tell the rest of the class what their opinions or conclusions are. No matter what the students talk about, they should always talk either to the teacher or their classmates, because as Rivers points out: "speaking does not itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person" (1966:196), otherwise, speaking for its own sake does not have any effect on improving communication skills.

Since country songs are mostly about real life, students will be very familiar with the topics and they can also talk about their own experience on the

subject. Students may discuss anything from serious social issues to telling jokes, from talking about responsibilities to free time activities.

Smiley also mentions, that "unlike ordinary stories, songs do not include all of the events in the story" and he invites to use students' imagination to fill in the missing details (1966:9). Some of the activities may be effectively used to play with students' imagination to discuss the missing or not stated events in the song.

I suggest these activities to practise speaking:

### **1) Feelings about a Song**

Discuss students' feeling of a song – do they like it? Why? Why not? Have they heard the song before? Would they turn off the radio if the song started playing? What mood does the song evoke? How do they imagine the singer of the song? What do they look like? How old are they? What might have moved the songwriter to write the song?

### **2) A Song as the Topic of a Follow-up Discussion**

After a song is played and students read the lyrics, or after another activity involving a song, discuss the story/events/problems/social issues/values that come out of the song with the students. Ask about their opinions and personal experiences.

### **Sample 1**

In the song called "Harder Cards" by Collin Raye a young policeman is called to solve home violence issues and finds a woman who shot her tyrannic husband. After seeing the woman's scars and evaluating the situation, he wraps the gun in the dead man's hand and reports the crime as a suicide. After the students listen to the song and read the lyrics, they are given these questions for a follow-up discussion:

- Do you think the policeman did the right thing?
- Should he have arrested the woman for murder?
- What would you do if you were the policeman?
- Is it acceptable to break law in the name of morality?
- Is it acceptable to lie not to hurt someone?

I recommend to use this activity for an intermediate level and higher.

For the lyric of the song "Harder Cards" see Appendix 9.2.

### **Sample 2**

Students listen to the song "Deny, Deny, Deny" by Brooks & Dunn and answer the questions.

*That wasn't me at a quarter to three back in our backyard  
Tearing up the roses and the home grown tomatoes in my new car  
Those bottles in the driveway and the bottles in the hall  
Well I don't know where they came from  
It must be burglars in the neighborhood  
I sure hope they catch those bums*

*I know you've got your own version of the truth  
There's only three things left now I can do  
Deny, deny, deny*

Questions for students:

- What did the man actually do?
- What excuses did he make to defend himself?
- Do you think his wife believed him?

Then the students are asked to invent as many excuses as possible for various unpleasant deeds they can imagine (e.g. *You broke your*



*neighbour's window. You don't have homework. You didn't study for a test.*). As the students are brainstorming their ideas, the teacher writes everything on the board. Naturally, the students must feel it is just fun and not to take the ideas seriously.

This activity is appropriate for pre-intermediate and higher levels.

### **3) Points of View**

Students read a song lyric, listen to the song and state a problem of the main character or a general problem that comes out of the song. Discuss the ways the character may solve it. Discuss how people of different age/gender/origin might be likely to solve the problem. Discuss how the students would deal with it themselves.

### **4) Giving Advice**

Distribute song lyrics, play the song and ask the students about advice/proverb that comes out of the song. Is there a lesson to be learned? Students can work in groups and compare their ideas.

### **5) Values**

Distribute song lyrics, play the song and discuss the values of the song with the students. What values are important for the character? What kind of people believe in these values?

### **6) Stereotypes**

Choose a song which is full of stereotypes of a specific topic. Introduce the topic to the students and ask about typical stereotypes. Then play the song to compare.

## **Sample**

Students listen to the song "Celebrity" by Brad Paisley and list all stereotypes that are associated with being a celebrity (e.g. dating supermodels, driving a Ferrari, suing own family members, getting married for less than a month). Then the students read the lyric to check and discuss their opinions about celebrity life. For the lyric of the song "Celebrity" see Appendix 9.1.

### **7) Mental Visualisation of the Words**

Students listen to a song with their eyes closed and try to imagine the characters and events of the song. Discuss what they have seen in their minds. Ask about how the music might look like. Brainstorm ideas and eventually play the music video for the students to compare.

### **8) Mental Visualisation of an Instrumental Song**

Play an instrumental segment or a whole song and discuss the mood and the story that the song might fit. Brainstorm ideas in groups and compare. Advanced learners might even try to write their own words to the music.

### **9) Story Prediction – Key Words**

Give students a title, the topic of the song and some key words. Let them invent what the story might be about. Then play the song to compare.

### **10) Story Prediction – Images**

Show students snapshots from a music video and ask them to guess the story. Alternatively, the images may be in a jumbled order and the students need to order them chronologically. Then read the song lyric and compare ideas. Finally play the music video.

### **11) Purpose of the Song**

Discuss the purpose of the singer to sing the song – are they complaining/celebrating/requesting/promising/warning?

### **12) Missing Details**

Discuss the facts and details that are not said in the song or which may be seen between the lines. Ask students about the characteristics and the appearance of the characters and description of places.

### **13) Roleplay**

Choose a couple of students and let them play the dialogues/events from a song in front of the class.

### **14) Song Likeness**

Prepare more versions of one song, play all versions to the students and ask about their favorite version (e.g. "Viva Las Vegas" by Elvis Presley, ZZ Top and The Grascals"). Discuss the factors that made their choice – tempo, color of the singer's voice. Does the mood of each song differ?

### **15) New Song Titles**

Students listen to a couple of songs and brainstorm as many new titles as possible. There might be a competition about the best new song title.

## **d) Writing**

Writing skills are the last of the four basic skills to be practised in English classes. Olshtain describes writing as "an interactive process which takes place between the writer and the reader via the text" (1991:235). When practising

writing skills in a classroom, writing means an ability of the learners to express themselves in a written form by means of a coherent and meaningful piece of text. Learners must be aware of the basic rules of spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

In addition, when students are putting down their thoughts, they always think about the language, which helps them acquire grammar structures. "It seems that the actual process of writing helps us to learn as we go along. The mental activity we have to go through in order to construct proper written texts is all part of the ongoing learning experience" (Harmer, 1998:79). Using songs for developing writing is appropriate for all levels. As Harmer points out, the teacher has to be sure, that the students have enough language, so they are able to complete the task (1998:86). Learners at a low level may start with simple poems and stories and more experienced students may practise creative writing, linking words and more expanded texts.

Regarding country songs as a tool for practising writing, there may not be any other skill that can be practised and improved in as many ways as the writing skills. Learners can work with a song in many various ways, from replacing individual lines of the song and thinking up new rhymes, to writing summaries of the story within a song and writing whole essays inspired by a specific song.

I suggest the following activities for practising writing skills:

### **1) Summary of a Song**

Students summarize a song's story as a coherent piece of text.

### **2) Paraphrase of a Song**

Alternatively, students paraphrase a song. They have to keep the original meaning, but they have to use different words.

### **3) Story Development**

Students develop the story of the song by inventing new events sequentially to the original song. How will the story end? What will the characters do? What will happen next? Students may also change the ending of the song and invent an alternative ending. More experienced students may try to develop the song by writing new rhyming verses.

### **4) Inspiration for an Essay**

A topic which comes out of a country song may very well serve as an inspiration for an essay. Students may develop characters, express themselves about the social issues stated in the song and/or compare the events from the song with their own experience.

### **5) Rewrite as a Newspaper Article**

Students rewrite the song as a newspaper article. They are also to invent a new catchy title of the song which describes the plot as closely as possible. They need to change the tense to the corresponding tenses that are usually used in headlines and articles.

### **6) Metaphors**

Students get a song lyric, listen to the song and look for metaphors and abstract expressions. They discuss the actual meaning of the phrases and then try to make up new creative metaphors expressing the same.

### **7) Description of a Character**

Students write a short description of a character from the song. They cover both personal characteristics and physical appearance.

### **8) A Letter to a Character**

Students write a letter to a character from the song to please them/cheer them up/warn them/give them advice, etc. Alternatively, the teacher may present the song as a letter by adding "Dear ..." at the top and "Yours sincerely..." at the bottom. Students think about the sender's identity (e.g. a famous celebrity) and then they write a letter as a response to the song.

### **9) Song Dictation**

Students listen to a song line by line and write down all the words. Finally they listen to the entire song to check. Alternatively, the teacher may read the song lyric themselves to the students and/or give them a handout with empty lyric lines with only a few words given (suitable for lower levels).

For a detailed sample lesson plan see Appendix 7.1.

### **10) Transferring a Song**

Students read a song lyric at a remote place in the classroom, memorize as much as they can, return to their desks and put down the words. They keep reading the lyric and writing down the words until they put down the whole song. The first student to finish wins. This activity may be also performed as pair work and the students switch their roles in the middle of the song. Finally, the song is played to check that they put down all the words correctly.

For a detailed sample lesson plan see Appendix 7.2.

### **11) Inventing Own Rhymes**

Students read song lyrics and change some of the lines of the song by replacing the rhymes with their own. They may change the whole lines or the rhyming words only. Changing the rhyming words very

often change the meaning. Student may compete about the most original version of the song.

### **12) Song Translation**

Students translate a song into L1 line by line. Experienced students may even try to invent corresponding rhymes in L1.

### **13) Writing an Own Song**

Students may even try to write an original song as a group. First they decide about a topic and they invent a story and its plot. They brainstorm ideas to write a good first line and look for rhymes to add a second line. Students can also work in smaller teams. Together they decide about the main events/stages within a song and put together a chorus. Then each group works on a separate verse. Finally all the groups put together their verses and add the chorus after each verse. Finally, they may need to change some details to make it perfect. Students will be highly motivated and actively involved in writing their own song.

### **14) Writing the Parody of a song**

As an easier alternative to the preceeding activity, students may try to write the parody of a song. First they listen to a song and read the lyric (e.g. "How Do You Like Me Now" by Toby Keith, see Appendix 9.3) and next listen to and read the words of the parody of the song (e.g. "How Do You Milk a Cow" by Cledus T. Judd, see Appendix 9.4). Next they listen to another song and try to write a parody of it. First they think about a new plot and then change line by line to create a parody. Writing a parody is easier because the structure, the number of lines, the number of syllables in each line and phrasing is given.

Students may work in pairs or small groups and compete about the best and funniest parody.

## **2) Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Cultural Background**

### **a) Grammar**

Communication without a sufficient amount of grammar knowledge is not possible in any language. If a speaker tries to express themselves with serious grammar mistakes, the other speaker will most likely not understand. Therefore, grammar is one of the most important elements in the language learning process. Larsen-Freeman warns against teaching grammar in isolation and suggests teaching it in context: "Whether or not the students are provided with explicit rules is really irrelevant to what it means to teach grammar. Neither should the teaching of grammar require focus on form or structure alone" (1991:280). Country songs are a great tool for practising grammar structures in context. A song lyric is a coherent piece of text containing natural language, which can be very usefully used for demonstrating various language features. To gain even more effect, the teacher may select a specific song with a great number of occurrences of the particular language item.

When teaching grammar, there are three dimensions that must be covered: "the form or structures themselves, their semantics or meaning, and the pragmatic conditions governing their use" (Larsen-Freeman, 1991:280). All these conditions are perfectly fulfilled with country songs: pupils can see the structure, usually occurring multiple times within a song, they can see the meaning from the context and they can also see its use in natural language.

There are truly many ways of practising language patterns via country songs. I suggest ten different activities for practising grammar, but naturally every teacher can come up with many more ideas:



### **1) Filling in Gaps**

Remove words of a specific kind out of a song lyric (e.g. adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, articles). Students complete the missing words according to the context and then listen to the song to check.

### **2) Filling in Gaps 2**

Students receive a song lyric with erased verbs. They listen to the song and complete the verbs in the correct form. Additional language work follows (See project #1).

### **3) Tense Practice**

Students receive a song lyric with verbs in the infinitive form in parenthesis. They complete the verbs in the correct form based on the context. Then they listen to the song to check.

### **4) Tense Correction**

Students receive a song lyric with mistakes in tenses. They correct all mistakes and then listen to the song to check.

### **5) Error Correction**

Insert mistakes of various kinds in a song lyrics. Students correct these mistakes and finally listen to the song to check.

### **6) Question Forming**

Students listen to a song, read the song lyrics and then brainstorm at least 20 different questions about the song (e.g. about the story, character, songwriter, etc.). The teacher writes all the questions on the board. It is important to keep demanding students' ideas until the number of questions reaches 20.

### **7) Punctuation**

Remove all punctuation marks from a song lyrics, distribute handouts and tell students to punctuate the song correctly. Alternatively, also changes in capitalization may be applied.

### **8) Detecting a Language Item Function**

Ask students about all occurrences of a specific word/phrase in a song lyric and students detect its function.

#### **Sample:**

Read the song lyric of "Looking for Love" by Sawyer Brown and mark all occurrences of "looking" that have the function of

- a) Past Continuous
- b) Present Perfect Continuous
- c) gerund
- d) present participle

For the lyric of the song "Looking for Love" see Appendix 9.5.

### **9) Mixed Word Order**

Change the word order in a chorus of a song and students put the words back in the correct order as they listen to the song.

### **10) Rewriting a Song**

Students may rewrite an original song in various ways:

- a) change singular to plural
- b) change the 1st person to the 3rd person
- c) change masculine to feminine
- d) change indirect speech to direct speech
- e) change the language from informal to formal
- f) change the tense (e.g. Past Simple to Present Simple)

- g) negate all the lines (replace all affirmative clauses with negative and vice versa)

#### **b) Vocabulary/Topic-Based Lessons**

Country songs may also effectively expand students' vocabulary. Seal claims that "to the non-language specialists, the common sense view of how languages are learned is that you substitute the words in your first language for the corresponding words in the second language. Words are perceived the building blocks upon which a knowledge of the second language can be built" (Seal, 1991:296). In spite of this rather amateur and naïve view which forgets about grammar, pronunciation, awareness of collocation and connotation and other aspects which build up a language, words remain a significant field for teaching a foreign language. A knowledge of a sufficient amount of vocabulary is essential for successful communication and having effective ways of teaching vocabulary should be one of the priorities in the language learning process. Even though many teachers still force students to memorize bilingual lists of words, there are many effective ways of teaching vocabulary in context.

When teaching vocabulary, the teacher must cover the basic aspects: spelling, pronunciation, meaning, use (e.g. transitivity/intransitivity, collocations, connotations). There are always planned words which the teacher expects the students to learn as well as unplanned vocabulary in the form of incidentally occurring unknown words which the students need to know to understand. In case of planned vocabulary, teachers usually teach words which relate to a specific topic. Country songs may help in a significant way and the teacher may pick a song dealing with the topic which is being worked with. Using a country song in a lesson enables the teacher to point out specific words in a song lyric in relation to the topic and the song also helps demonstrate using the words in context. A song may also be used as an introductory activity when new words are taught and then the teacher introduces the topic.

Suggested activities for teaching vocabulary:

**1) A Song as a Source of Topic-Related Words**

The teacher uses a specific song for teaching thematic vocabulary. For a detailed sample lesson plan see Appendix 5.1).

**2) Vocabulary Prediction**

Give the students the title and the theme of the song. The students are to predict vocabulary they expect to hear. Play the song for the students to check and compare, then teach new words.

**3) Draw a Song**

Play a song to the students and tell them to draw a picture of it (e.g. a specific scene, event or character). Pay attention to details. The students compare their drawings with each other.

**4) A Song as a Crossword**

Distribute a song lyric with some erased words, then hand out a list of numbered definitions of the words. Students complete the words in gaps, then listen to the song to check.

**5) Word Recognition**

Students read a song lyric and the teacher says the definition of a word or a phrase. When somebody recognizes the word or the phrase, they raise a hand and say it. This activity can be done as a competition among pairs/teams.

**6) Bingo**

The teacher prepares about 15 definitions of words from a song. Each student has a different list of 5 definitions. There should not be

two lists that include exactly the same words. The song is played and students tick words as they hear them. When somebody ticks all 5 definitions, they announce bingo and win. With children of a lower level the teacher can read the song lyrics instead of playing the song.

### **7) Matching Collocations**

Students get two lists of compounds/phrases with prepositions/phrasal verbs divided in halves. Their task is to match the correct parts according to their collocative use.

### **8) Listing Items**

Students listen to a song and list all items of a given kind (e.g. occupations, Christmas-related words).

### **Sample**

Students listen to the song "The Talkin' Song Repair Blues" by Alan Jackson and list all auto parts (i.e. hood, timing belt, spark plug wires, main prodspander, torque converter, water pump). For the lyric of the song "The Talkin' Song Repair Blues" see Appendix 9.8.

### **9) Word Correction**

Distribute song lyrics with some changed words. Students listen to a song and replace the incorrect words in the song.

### **10) Synonyms/Antonyms**

Students get a song lyric when some words are replaced by synonyms/antonyms. They are to put back the original words. Then they listen to a song to check.

### **11) Acting a Song Out**

Hand out song lyrics, explain new words/phrases and suggest a way of gesturing new words/phrases. Play the song and the students act out the song.

For a detailed sample lesson plan see Appendix 4.1.

### **c) Pronunciation**

Pronunciation should not definitely be underestimated in the language learning process. "There is a threshold level of pronunciation in English such that if a given nonnative speaker's pronunciation falls below this level, he or she will not be able to communicate orally no matter how good his or her control of English grammar and vocabulary might be" (Hirafotis & Bailey, 1980). As Celce-Murcia points out, "the goal of teaching pronunciation to learners is not necessarily to make them sound like native speakers of English. With the exception of a few highly gifted and motivated individuals, such a goal is quite unrealistic" (1991:137).

Country songs can be effectively used for practising pronunciation in various ways. Not only do students improve their pronunciation when they listen to a song, follow the song lyrics and actually hear the correct pronunciation, but they can also practise the phonemes (e.g. transcribing song lyrics or a part of a song lyric into phonetical symbols - IPA). Since songs include many rhymes consisting of similarly sounding words, students can practise these similarities and minimal pairs to distinguish the differences securely.

Suggested activities:

#### **1) Words into IPA**

Students practise phonetic symbols by transcribing a song or a part of a song into symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet.

## **2) Phoneme Detection**

Replace some words in a song lyric by phonetic transcriptions. Student read the symbols and write the correct words. Then they listen to the song to check.

## **3) Minimal Pairs/Similar Sounds**

Change a song lyric into a multiple-choice exercise by adding similar sounding words in the text. Students listen to the song, follow the text and choose the words that they hear.

### **Sample**

Read the song lyric of "This One's for the Girls" by Martina McBride, listen to the song and circle the words that you hear.

*This is for all you girls about (three/thirteen/thirty)*  
*High school can be so (raw/rough/roof); can be so mean*  
*Hold onto, onto your (science/silence/innocence)*  
*Stand your (grand/ground/great), when everybody's givin' in*  
*This one's for the girls*

## **4) Rhythm & Stress**

Students receive a song lyric and mark all stressed words. Then they try to read out the song with correct stress and rhythm. Finally they listen to a song to check. Slower songs are more efficient for this type of activity.

### **Sample**

The teacher distributes the song lyric of "Little Moments" by Brad Paisley, the students listen to the song and mark all stressed words.

Well, I'll never forget the first time that I heard  
That pretty mouth say that dirty word  
And I can't even remember now what she backed my truck into  
But she covered her mouth and her face got red  
And she just looked so darn cute  
That I couldn't even act like I was mad  
Yeah, I live for little moments like that

### 5) Find the Stress Pattern

Students are given a certain stress pattern (e.g. stress on the penultimate syllable). They read through a song lyric and mark words with the given stress pattern. Then they listen to the song to check. Slower songs recommended.

### 6) Counting Syllables

Students get a song lyric and they count syllables in each line. The song is played for the students to check. Slower songs are more efficient for this type of activity.

### 7) Finding a Given Sound

Students are given a specific sound to find in a song lyric. They mark all words containing the sound.

### Sample

The teacher distributes lyrics of the song "Something That We Do" by Clint Black. The students read the lyric and mark all occurrences of the phonemes [e] and [schwa]:

I rememeber ell the e day we ed  
I can see that picture in my head



*I still believe the words we said  
Forever will ring true*

*Love is certain, love is kind  
Love is yours and love is mine  
But it isn't something that we find  
It's something that we do*

#### **d) Cultural Background**

Since language is a part of the culture of each particular country or nation, learning and understanding the cultural background takes an important place in the learning process. "The songs offer insights into the culture and especially the stories and myths of different societies, providing a window into the frames of reference and values of the peoples whose language we are learning. They offer a rich background and a social and historical context into language learning" (Griffie, 1992:ix). Each country and each nation has their own songs that are a part of their cultural heritage. As Papa claims, if students appreciate a particular song, they might adopt it and the song become a part of their own culture (1979:8).

Country songs can also be effectively used for teaching and exploring American culture and history. Students can listen to songs and learn about specific historical events as well as annual festivals, cultural habits and traditions. Since each historical event or tradition that is considered to be taught by means of country songs requires an individual preparation, I offer several sample activities to illustrate the way history and culture can be presented to the students.

### **1) Learning about Historical Events**

The teacher introduces a specific historical period or event and provides the students with a lot of material and information. The students learn about the details and then listen to a song which illustrates the past events, typical features of the period and the views of people at the time. Finally the teacher develops discussion.

#### **Sample 1**

The students learn about the Baby Boom generation in the USA by means of the song "Kids of the Baby Boom" by the Bellamy Brothers. For a detailed lesson plan see Appendix 6.1

#### **Sample 2**

The teacher describes the events of 9/11 to the students. They talk about the terrorist attacks, view pictures and talk about the way the disaster influenced the modern world. Then the students listen to the song "Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning" by Alan Jackson and the teacher develops discussion:

- What do you think that people were thinking when they first heard of what had happened?
- How did people feel at the time?
- What were the first reactions of the people?
- How does the singer feel in the song?

For the lyric of the song "Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning" see Appendix 9.9.

### **2) Special Occasions**

The students learn about American holidays, festivals and traditions. They listen to songs to get a picture of the mood of the events and the

details of the way the festival is usually celebrated. The students can also compare the similarities and differences of how the festival is celebrated in the USA and the Czech Republic.

### **Sample**

The students listen to "The Christmas Song" by Joe Diffie and they list all words connected with Christmas (e.g. reindeer, mistletoe, toys, Santa, sleigh, Jack Frost, carols). They talk about Christmas traditions in the USA and they compare them to the Czech traditions (for the song lyric of "The Christmas Song" see Appendix 9.7)

## **IV. HYPOTHESIS**

"Using a country song in EFL classes can become an effective means of teaching different aspects of the English language, which makes the lessons more colorful, interesting and enjoyable and therefore listening to and analysing country songs may improve English lessons."

## **V. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

Before the first country songs based project was dealt with, I carried out a survey at several elementary schools in Liberec and Jablonec nad Nisou to monitor learners' musical tastes, listening habits as well as their experience of working with songs in language classes. I received 200 answered questionnaires and the results enabled me to learn about the tastes of the students and the types of activities they had been used to doing with songs and I could subsequently prepare in a better way for the projects.

The first question focused on the musical tastes of the students. I suggested 15 music genres in the questionnaire and simultaneously enabled students to add their own. Some of the students marked only one music genre and some often marked most of them since they appreciated a variety of music styles. In order to get as relevant data as possible, I counted 1 vote for a genre that was filled in as the only one and a portion of a vote for multiple genres (e.g. if a student marked 8 music genres, each genre counted as 1/8 of a vote). As I expected, most students listened to rock, pop and hip hop with only a little concern for country music (for the complete results of the survey see Appendices 1.2-1.6).

The students were also asked about their experience of working with songs in English classes. Even though 90% of them said they appreciated this type of activities, only 9% of the students responded that their teachers were using songs for teaching on a regular basis (see Figure 3). 63% of the students complained that they worked with songs very rarely.



**FIGURE 3: How often do you listen to music in English lessons?**

An interesting finding was that sometimes the responses differed even within the same group of students, which shows how differently the students perceive various learning activities and how different their tastes and preferences are.

One of the last questions in the questionnaire dealt with the typical amount of time that teachers usually devoted to working with songs. 17% of the students responded that they usually spent up to 5 minutes dealing with a song, which probably involves playing the song with no further activities. 27% answered that they usually did not spend more than 10 minutes working with a song and 46% said the song activities took them about 10-20 minutes. Only 10% of the students said they dealt with songs for more than 20 minutes. My projects consisted of multiple activities and most of them were designed for the whole 45-minute lessons, so that the students had a chance to experience learning English in a new way.

During my teaching practice I performed a total of 6 different projects dealing with country songs. Each of the project was focusing on a different area of the language in a unique way. I was working with two groups of students: 9.C (aged 14-15) and 6.A (aged 11-12).

### **A. Project #1 – Grammar**

The very first project was carried out in the ninth grade class, which was a group of 16 pupils aged 14-15 at a lower Pre-Intermediate level. As I found out from the questionnaire and also was told by the regular teacher, the students were not used to dealing with songs much. From time to time they worked only with a song that was featured in the textbook. For this reason I picked a type of activity that they had already been used to to introduce working with songs in a familiar way for the students.

Since the students were not familiar with contemporary country music at all, I paid special attention to the selection of the song for the first project. I

eventually chose a mid-tempo song by Collin Raye called "I Can Still Feel You", which was not too traditional and which had very clearly understandable lyrics. I also paid attention to the amount of grammar features included in the song, so it was appropriate for the level of the students. The song includes many sentences in the Present Simple and Present Continuous tense, which was the target language feature for the activity, and not too much unknown vocabulary that needed to be pretaught. The singer sings the song very clearly and it is very easy to understand the words, which was very important for the students. Therefore my choice of the song was very optimal for the activity.

The students were given a handout with a song lyric with some erased verbs and their task was to complete the missing words in the correct form as they listened to the song. The students were told to fill in either the Present Simple or Present Continuous form.

Since the students had been used to filling in gaps and working with this type of activity, they seemed to have no problems with completing the task, which I could clearly see as I checked their answers. As a follow-up activity, the students were asked to choose five verbs from the song and write five negative sentences (an activity which they had practised the previous week). Again, the activity did not cause many difficulties to the students and proved that most of the students sufficiently acquired the use of present tenses.

The first project was very successful and the students managed to complete the tasks without major problems. They were dealing with an activity they had been familiar with and they were introduced to taking a song as a basis for follow-up activities. They could see that working with a song is a serious way of practising language structures and not just a sigh relief, but they could also witness that using songs may liven up lessons and is different from other regular activities that may seem to be considered rather as laborious tasks (Murphey, 1992:6).

In addition, the students were also introduced to modern country music, a genre that most of them had not been familiar with. Even though the students

were teenagers and they apparently did not listen to country music in their free time, I did not notice any signs of antipathy. At the end of the lesson I asked them whether they liked the song and they said they had loved it and enjoyed working with it. I could see that playing a country song and working with it is a very motivating, effective and enjoyable activity no matter that the students do not particularly listen to the genre.

I was able to compare the experience of the first project to an activity involving a song featured in the textbook Project 4 which I carried out with the same group of students about two lessons before the first country songs related project was introduced. The activity consisted of only one stage and the students were filling missing words in gaps. Then the book invited students to sing to the CD. I carefully followed given instructions and could see that the song was not really working. It was full of unknown and slang expressions and I spent more than ten minutes explaining them before I could get to the activity. Some of the phrases were sung very unclearly and most students were not able to catch them. As I had expected, the students were very reluctant to sing to the song at the end of the activity. I could see that the song featured in the textbook was inappropriate for classroom use and the instructions were very weak. My project was better in a lot of cases, because I carefully selected a song based on the students' actual needs and I also paid attention to the singer's voice, so the students could clearly understand the words. I proved that specially constructed songs for specific purposes work much better than universal textbook songs.

For the detailed lesson plan and sample song lyric see Appendix 3.1.

## **B. Project #2 – Vocabulary**

The second project was carried out in a class of 21 pupils aged 10-11 years old at an Elementary level. Since it was also the first time this class was facing country songs as a teaching tool, these students completed a questionnaire

about their musical tastes, too and discussed some of their habits involving listening to music before the activity was worked with.

Then the activity was introduced. I told the students that they were about to learn and practise new verbs in an unusual way. All the new verbs were written on the board, I pointed at each verb, acted its meaning out and the students were guessing the equivalent words in the Czech language. The students managed to guess most of the verbs very successfully and eventually they put the new words down in their mini-dictionaries.

The song I chose for practising the new verbs was "Hearts Are When You Want to Love Someone" by Collin Raye. It was a slow song sung with a very clear voice and very simple phrasing, which was easy to understand. The song featured only the Present Simple tense and the students knew almost all words. Since the song did not include any complex structures and unknown vocabulary, so it was very appropriate for the Elementary level.

Sheets with song lyrics were distributed among the students, the song was played twice and the students were filling in the gaps with the missing nouns. This activity was already familiar to the students and it proved to be a good start to working with songs in English classes with this group of students. The new verbs that had been pretaught were not erased from the song lyric, so the students had no difficulties with completing newly learned words. The students were filling in only words they had already known, so it did not cause them many troubles.

Then the students were told to mime the song. I was reading the lyric line by line and asking the students about their ideas of the way to gesture each line. The students were responding very actively and I was overwhelmed with their ideas. The students and I picked a way to gesture each line and then the song was played again. The students stood up and were acting the song out.

Since they seemed to be enjoying the activity very much, I decided to play the song once again and invited two of the most talented students in front of the class. It was a very magical moment to see all the happy students working and



responding very actively and I could see the astonished regular teacher observing the class and watching interaction she had probably not seen before. Another interesting thing was that the students were confidently acting verbs out they had learned only about 20 minutes before.

The lesson was extremely successful especially because the choice of the song was very appropriate. The singer's voice was very clear and phrasing was very easy to understand, so that the students were not disturbed with a low level of understanding and were able to focus on gesturing new vocabulary.

Learning new words by acting the words out was apparently new for the students and they seemed to be very excited about it. They were very active and co-operative and therefore I extended the activity and asked two talented students to act the song out in front of the rest of the class. Gesturing the words was very effective way of learning, because children remember much more what they do in comparison to what they hear or see.

The students also enjoyed the song very much even though none of them in the questionnaire responded that they were listening to country music, which proved that country songs really are very useful teaching tool no matter what music genre the students appreciate.

For the detailed lesson plan and the sample song lyric see Appendix 4.1.

### **C. Project #3 - Topic-Based Lesson**

The next project was carried out with the ninth grade students at a Pre-Intermediate level again. A total of 16 students was present in the lesson. This project was topic-oriented and I chose the topic of jobs, because the students in this class were supposed to consider their future careers and they were about to apply for studying at high schools in a few of months.

First I did some brainstorming with the students and they came up with ideas which I put on the board. I tried to avoid all words that were connected

with specific jobs. The students put together a list of words such as work, labor, pay, salary, overtime, etc.

The song that I prepared for this project was a mid-tempo song "Forty Hour Week" by Alabama. It was a very appropriate song, because it celebrates a common worker and the lyric mentions numerous specific occupations. It included mainly the Present Simple tense and all the structures were rather simple. The tempo of the song varied at various parts, thus it might be a bit difficult for the students to catch all words.

Before I distributed the song lyric, I pretaught unknown vocabulary. The students were about to listen to a song and fill in the gaps with the missing words. All the words were associated with jobs and job titles. Some students found it difficult to catch everything as the singer was playing with phrasing and changing the tempo in several parts of the song. When I checked the answers with the class, I told them to put down all the occupations that are represented in the song. Some of the job titles were mentioned in the song, but many of them were represented with phrases such as "the one who brings the mail," "the one who fights the fires," "the one who swings the hammer," etc. The students managed to find a total of 13 jobs in the song. Then I explained the phrase 'everyone who works behind the scenes' and asked for examples of types of workers who are usually not seen during their work but whose work is taken for granted by most people. The students seemed interested in the topic and they came up with about a dozen of such jobs.

When we finished working with the song, a follow-up discussion continued. I asked the students about what jobs they considered the easiest and the most demanding, the lowest and highest paid, the most boring and most interesting. Then I asked about their favorite jobs, dream jobs and their own future plans. The students were responding very actively and they were also showing interest in their classmates' responses.

It was very surprising that even though the students were about to send off applications to high schools very soon, most of them had absolutely no idea not

only about a specific job they would like to do in their lives, but not even about an area that they might like. Some of the answers were smart, however, most students were undecided or had rather naïve future plans.

The activities based on the song filled the whole 45 minutes and the song perfectly linked all the activities. The lesson was coherent and successful. The only difficulty was that some of the students were not able to catch certain phrases in the song which were pronounced fast. I should have expected this and erased only words that were pronounced with a constant speed of voice.

This project was the second one that was presented to this class. At the end of the lesson I asked the students about their opinion and they said they liked the lessons, because it felt more like a game and learning was not monotonous. They also said that they wanted to have other songs involving lessons, which was very pleasant, satisfactory and motivating for me as the teacher.

For the detailed lesson plan and the sample song lyric see Appendix 5.1.

#### **D. Project #4 – History**

The fourth project was presented in the ninth grade class and there were 14 students this lesson. The project dealt with historical and cultural topics and the song I had prepared for this lesson was about the Baby Boom in the USA - "Kids of the Baby Boom" by the Bellamy Brothers. The song describes a typical lifestyle, trends and aspects of the Baby Boom generation including the issues of wealth and free time activities and simultaneously explains the feeling of isolation in today's world. The song features mainly the Past Simple and Present Simple tense and there is also a noticable number of unknown vocabulary which is necessary to preteach before playing the song for the students.

First of all, I asked the students about what they knew about World War II. I was very surprised that most of them were very unsure about the dates of the beginning and the end of the war. When they finally put together 1939 and

1945, I asked about the exact dates. Nobody knew. A funny moment was when the regular teacher, who was observing the lesson, wanted to give them a hint and she asked about what they considered the worst day of the year and a few students immediately recalled September 1. When I asked about the end of the war, somebody said May 9, so I specified the exact day of the end of the war in the Czech Republic.

Secondly, I asked about the winners and losers of the war and this time I got more satisfying responses. My further questions were about the greatest gainers and in what parts of the world the war took place. I was trying to lead up all the answers to the USA and their great profit. I found that even though the students had had history lessons for 5 years, they knew very little about World War II.

Next I told the class about the American soldiers returning home after a very long time and explained the term Baby Boom. I also described some of the typical factors and circumstances of the generation and also named some famous baby boomers born 1946-1947, who have been important political and cultural leaders in the past 20 years.

Finally I distributed handouts with the song lyric and after pre-teaching new vocabulary I played the song "Kids of the Baby Boom" to illustrate the lifestyle of the baby boomers. To practise the listening skills of the students, they were also completing missing phrases in gaps. The students were asked to name the typical features of the baby boom generation that appeared in the text and we were also talking about some other featured phrases such as "a land of milk and honey," "a nation full of takers" and "a generation screaming for more room."

When we finished talking about the Baby Boom, I started a discussion about the USA in general. I asked the students about what places they knew, their favorite places they would like to visit and their general opinions on working abroad.

I could clearly see how fascinating country the USA is in the eyes of the students and how many of them would like to see it in real. The song was a brilliant key element in this lesson and the students were responding to the

song in an unbelievable way. I also proved that country songs may be a very effective source for teaching cultural and historical events in language classes.

For the detailed lesson plan and the sample song lyric see Appendix 6.1.

#### **E. Project #5 – Writing Skills**

The fifth project was carried out with the same group of students aged 14-15 from whom 13 were present in the lesson. This project, which was focusing on comprehension, differed in a great way. The students did not get sheets with the song lyric but they received blank papers only. I told the students they would try a song dictation and rewrite the complete song as they hear it.

Since the activity is very difficult and involves 100% comprehension of all the words from the lyric, I selected a very slow and simple song. The song was named "Hearts Are When You Want To Love Someone" by Collin Raye. The structure of the song was very simple, including the Present Simple tense and an elementary vocabulary. The singer's voice and phrasing was very clear and all the words could be easily understood.

First I played the entire song for the students to get a picture of the song and focus on the words to see whether they can understand properly. Then I played the song in short segments and the students were putting down all the words they could hear. I kept pressing the pause button and waiting for the students to write down the words. Sometimes I had to rewind some of the lines and play them over and over again, because more than half of the students seemed to have difficulties with catching some of the words.

When the students finished with their writing, I played the complete song one last time for the students to check. Since I felt that some students might have had incomplete lines of the song, I was asking individual students for reading out certain lines of the song. There was no student in the class who had no mistakes. Some of the students also had serious problems with spelling.

Therefore I asked about the spelling of particular words in order for all students to have correctly spelled words.

I found this activity very useful under certain circumstances. Firstly the song that is used must be very clear to understand. I found it very difficult for the students to understand and catch all the words directly from the CD even though the song was very slow, simple and with a clear lyric. Probably no song would do any better with the lower Pre-Intermediate level. For further use I strongly recommend playing the complete song only at the beginning and then the teacher dictates the song lyrics in short pieces. Then the song is played at the end as a final check. Pre-Intermediate students were not able to catch a great number of words correctly and some of them even seemed to be frustrated during the activity when they could not understand so many words from the song. Therefore I recommend rewriting an entire song directly from the CD only for the Intermediate level and higher.

Although this activity might have seemed too difficult for some of the students, a few students declared this activity as their favorite of all the song related projects they had already experienced, which I found rather surprising. I learned that different students appreciate different kind of activities and it is very important to always ask the students what they like and feel, because their interests may often be different from the assumptions or feelings of the teacher.

For the detailed lesson plan and the sample song lyric see Appendix 7.1.

#### **F. Project #6 - Multi-Skill Contest**

The final project was also presented to the same students in the ninth grade and 14 of them were present. The last song related project was rather unique, since it was focused on practising many skills at one time. It was also a fascinating contest for pairs. The song I used was Alan Jackson's "www.memory," which has a smart and simple lyric and the structure mainly includes different types of future tenses.

Before the lesson started, I had placed several sheets with a song lyric in the classroom. Then I announced the contest, paired the students and gave them the instructions. One of them was sitting by the desk and the other one had to run to the closest song lyric, memorize as many lines as possible, return to the desk and dictate all they could remember to their peer. Their partners were to write down all the words of the song lyric. Each pair was competing to transfer the song faster than their opponents. The students switched their roles in the middle of the song and the first one to memorize the song sat down by the desk and started rewriting the rest of the song as their partner was dictating it to them.

When the first pair finished rewriting the song, I waited for a while until there were two or three more pairs finished and then I ended the contest and declared the winners. Then I played the song for all the students to check whether they put it down correctly.

Finally I started a discussion and was asking the students about the content of the song. We were talking about their own PC skills, experience and common difficulties. They seemed to be very interested in technology, computers and the Internet and they were responding very actively.

The students proved to be very competitive and seemed to be enjoying the activity a lot as they were rushing to the sheet with the song lyric and back to the desk in order to beat the other pairs. The most interesting thing was to observe the way the students were memorizing the lyric. Some of them preferred to memorize the first four or five words and run, and some of them spent more time at the song sheet trying to memorize a few lines at one time. Sometimes I could see that a pupil apparently forgot everything on the way back to the desk and had to return to memorize it again.

This activity was effective and the students were practising multiple skills at one time. First they read a part of the lyrics and memorized as much as they could. Although reading comprehension was not the key at this stage of the activity, they could see the correct spelling and also the featured collocations.

Then they were interpreting the part of the song to their partners, who were listening and writing down the words. It is true, however, that the students were not practising speaking and writing in terms of productive skills, since they were only interpreting a given piece of text, first vocally, then in a written form. On the other hand, they were practising pronunciation as they were dictating the song to their partner and their partner was practising spelling as they were putting the song down, so this activity was still suitable and effective. At the end of the activity the students were discussing the content of the song and they were talking about their own PC skills and experience, which involved comprehension of the song lyric.

As everything was perfectly working in the lesson and the students were extremely active and co-operative, I consider the final project as one of the most successful ones. I could also see that practising multiple skills at one time is very effective. Since the sixth project was the very last, I thanked the students for their co-operation and asked them for some feedback.

For the detailed lesson plan and the sample song lyric see Appendix 8.1.

### **G. Summary of the Projects**

At the end of the very last project I carried out a survey to get feedback from the students. I was asking them about their feelings and reactions on the individual projects. What was very interesting for me was that everybody had a different favorite project. They appreciated all the projects very positively, they said they had liked the songs and had enjoyed the activities because dealing with songs was refreshing and also different from what they normally did in lessons.

I was surprised that two students declared the song dictation as their favorite activity, even though most students seemed to have many difficulties with catching many words during the activity. Therefore it was a very interesting



finding that they picked this one as their favorite. This proves that all students have different tastes and everybody appreciates something different.

The students also said they had liked the songs very much, which proves that country songs are very suitable and appropriate for classroom use no matter that the students had not been familiar with the genre before and teachers should not be afraid to use country songs in English lessons.

The greatest appreciation came from the regular teacher, when she asked me for copies of all the lesson plans and a copy of the CD, because she liked my projects so much, that she wanted to use them with further classes. As I heard later, she even made more copies for other teachers for them to use it as well. I was very pleased with this, because this shows how successful my projects were.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The goal of my work was to focus on using country songs as a teaching tool in language classes. I wanted to prove that country songs are very effective and universal aid that can be modified in many ways and turned into different kinds of activities for teaching, practising and revising numerous aspects of English as a foreign language.

First I carried out music questionnaires to collect data on the musical tastes and listening habits of the learners as well as to learn about their experience with the typical use of songs in their language classes. The results of the questionnaire helped me analyze and understand learner's habits and enabled me more effectively prepare for the projects. I found that 90% of the students actually enjoyed working with songs in English lessons and 63% of them complained that their regular teachers were using songs very rarely. This showed that the English teachers who worked at the schools where I carried out

my survey were not aware of students' interests in music and they were lacking in including songs in their lessons.

In my work I have explained the importance of using songs in language classes and described the main advantages of country music over other music styles. Most country songs capture a unique story and therefore the words must be clearly understood, so that the listener can hear what the song says. The topics of country songs can from everyday life, so the students can understand the content of the song and they can also relate to it. Since country music appeals to audiences of all ages, the songs do not contain any inappropriate language and the teachers can play those songs for children without any worries.

I have described different ways to use country songs for teaching the English language as well as basic criteria for selecting and evaluating suitable songs for classroom use. I have suggested several sources of both song lyrics and the audio files. I have shown how the four basic skills and grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and cultural background can be taught, practised and revised by means of country songs and suggested over 70 different activities for using songs in English classes. I created six sample lesson plans for practising different skills and language structures and carried out these plans with elementary school school learners in Jablonec nad Nisou in 2007. When I presented the projects to the children and analyzed the findings, I could clearly see how motivated, excited and co-operative the students were. They were enjoying learning English in an amusing and creative way and all of them were actively involved in the learning process.

I also proved that working with country songs is very useful and enjoyable even though that the learners appreciate other music genres. All the pupils I have worked with said they liked the songs, which might be a clear sign for all teachers who may be worried that country music is not appropriate and popular among elementary school children. I proved that they really can enjoy and effectively work with the country music songs.

I have successfully fulfilled my assumptions and confirmed that country songs can be effectively used for teaching English in EFL classes and they can really improve the English lessons.

However, my work is definitely not complete. Every skill and area of the English language can be examined more deeply and many more activities can be invented for classroom use. All of the activities that I suggested can be further modified and developed in any way that teachers find useful.

Additionally, even more areas of language can be practised by means of country songs. Since most country songs come from the USA, a great number of differences between American and British English can be shown and explained by using country songs. Teachers may simply point out any americanisms and explain corresponding words and structures in British English. When choosing songs that come from the American South, a significant number of slang expressions can be demonstrated in country songs. Alternatively, also idiomatic expressions can be effectively shown and taught by means of country songs.

Apart from working with songs and song lyrics, which was my primary focus, other fields related to music may also be used in English lessons. Students may deal with biographies of the singers and musicians and with personal and artistic development of country bands. They may also write reviews of albums or discuss country hit charts. It seems that the potential use of songs and music in language teaching is inexhaustible.

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## **VIII. APPENDICES**

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## APPENDIX 1.1

### MUSIC QUESTIONNAIRE

**1) What kind of music do you prefer?**

(circle one or more music genres)

- |           |                |                    |                 |
|-----------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| a) pop    | e) jazz        | i) bluegrass       | m) hip hop      |
| b) rock   | f) country     | j) folk            | n) brass music  |
| c) disco  | g) house       | k) metal           | o) punk         |
| d) techno | h) rock'n'roll | l) classical music | p) other: _____ |

**2) How often do you listen to music?**

(circle one of the possibilities)

- |                     |           |
|---------------------|-----------|
| a) every day        | c) rarely |
| b) 2-3 times a week | d) never  |

**3) Do you like listening to music in English lessons?**

(circle one of the possibilities)

- |                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| a) yes, very much | c) from time to time |
| b) yes, sometimes | d) no, it's boring   |

**4) How often do you listen to music in English lessons?**

(circle one of the possibilities)

- |                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| a) every lesson | c) 1-2 times a month |
| b) every week   | d) rarely            |

**5) When you listen to a song at school, do you translate it into Czech?**

(circle one of the possibilities)

- |                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| a) yes, every time | c) new words only  |
| b) yes, sometimes  | d) no, usually not |

**6) When you listen to a song, do you want to know what the song is about?**

(circle one of the possibilities)

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| a) yes, I want to translate it | c) I just listen to it, I don't need to translate it |
| b) yes, sometimes              | d) no, I don't care                                  |

**7) How long do you usually work with a song in an English lesson?**

(circle one of the possibilities)

- |                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| a) up to 5 minutes | c) 10-20 minutes        |
| b) 5-10 minutes    | d) more than 20 minutes |

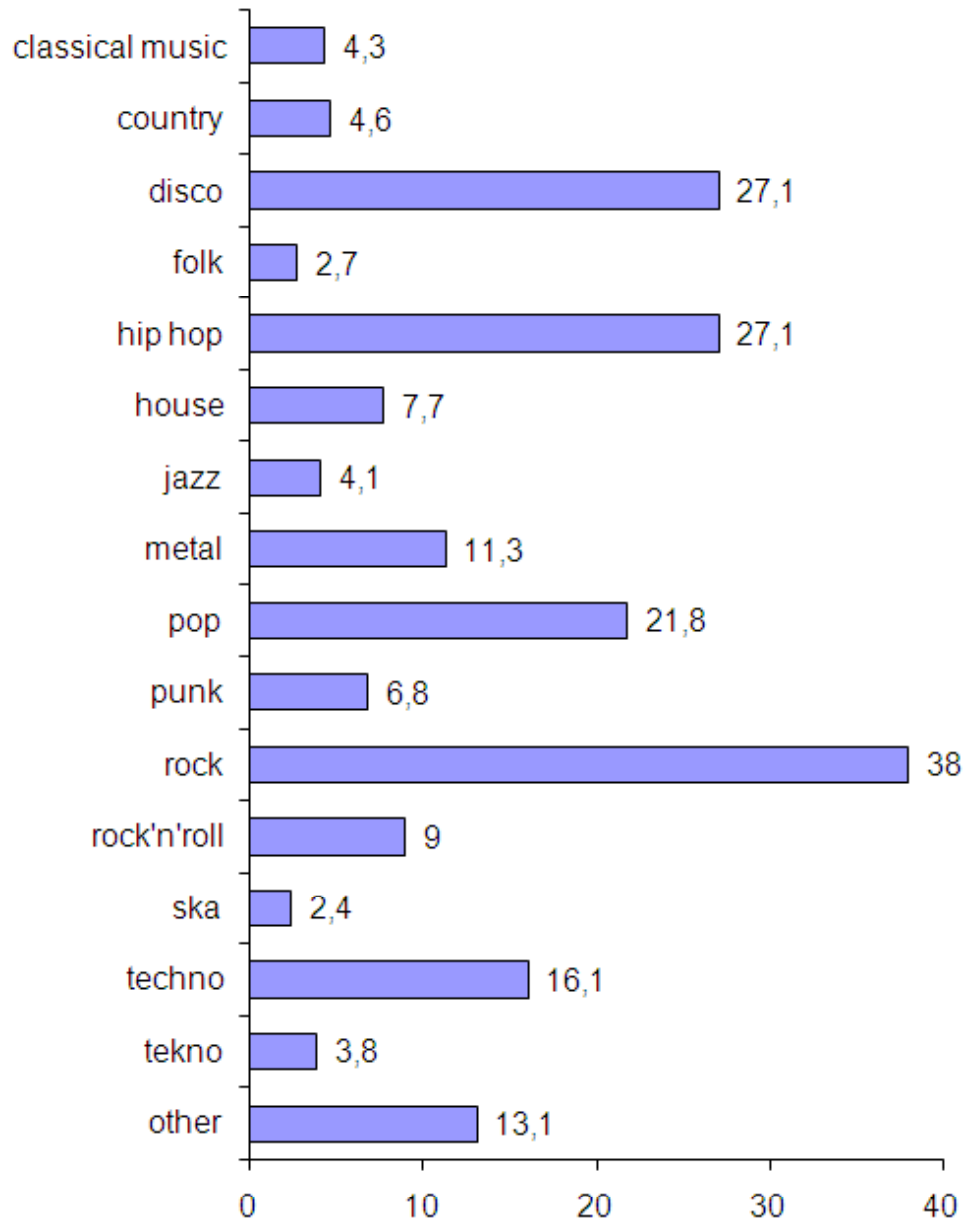
**8) Do you know any American country singer who is popular now?**

(write his or her name)

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 1.2

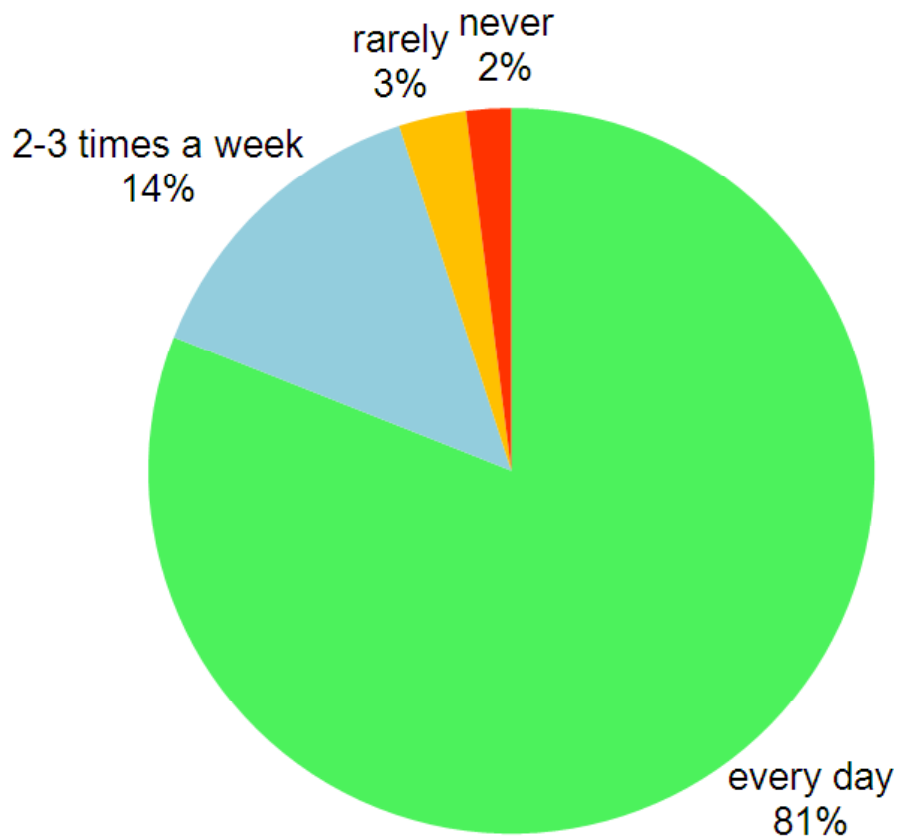
### What kind of music do you prefer?



A total number of respondents: 200

## APPENDIX 1.3

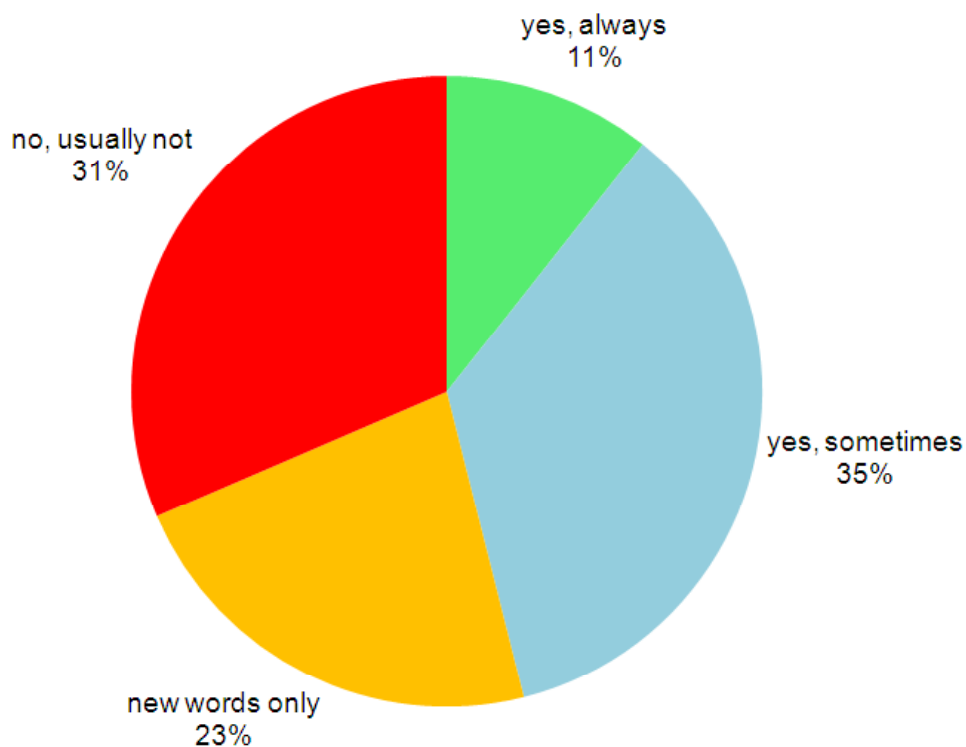
### How often do you listen to music?



A total number of respondents: 200

## APPENDIX 1.4

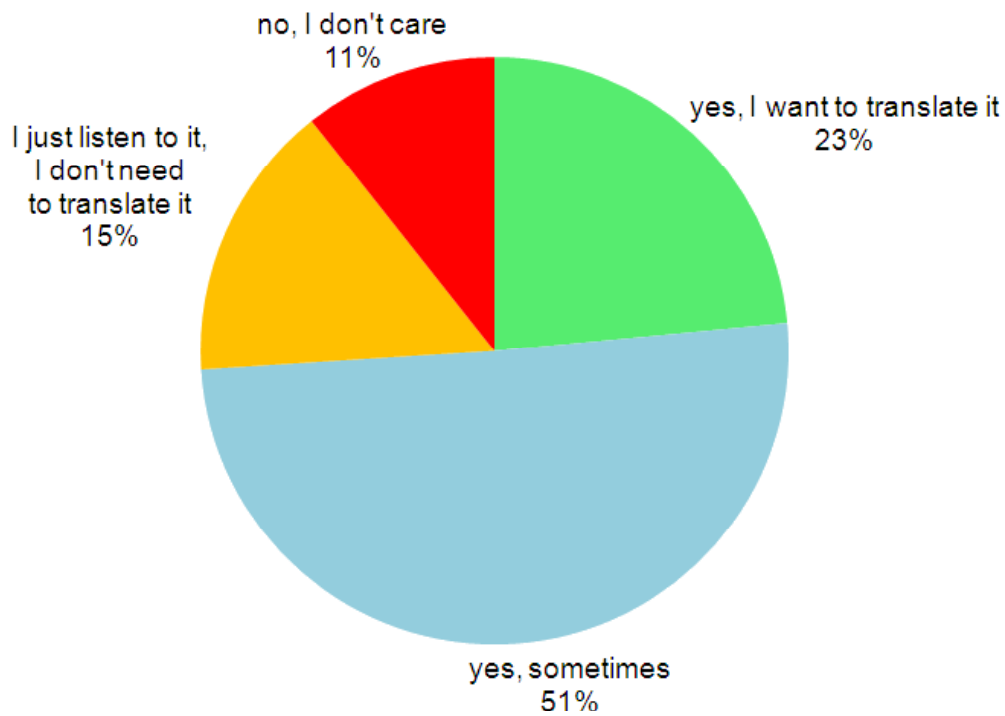
When you listen to a song at school, do you translate it into Czech?



A total number of respondents: 200

## APPENDIX 1.5

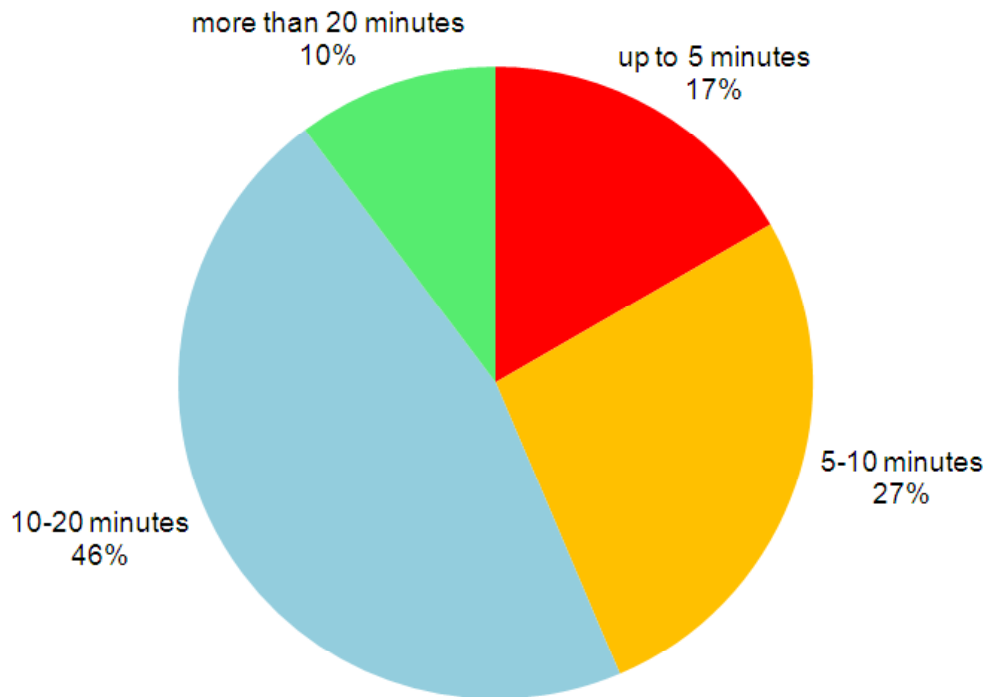
When you listen to a song, do you want to know what the song is about?



A total number of respondents: 200

## APPENDIX 1.6

**How long do you usually work with a song in an English lesson?**



**A total number of respondents: 200**



## APPENDIX 2.1

### **An Interview with Jo Walker-Meador, CMA Executive Director**

On August 14, 2008 I interviewed Jo Walker-Meador, who was the Executive Director of the Country Music Association from 1962 to 1991 and played an extremely important part in the development of the genre. Some of her credits include establishing the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, launching the annual CMA Awards show, whose live TV broadcast is regularly watched by an average of 35 million viewers, and establishing the CMA Music Festival (formerly known as the Fan Fair), which welcomed over 191,000 visitors in Nashville in 2008. I asked Mrs. Walker-Meador about her opinion on characteristics of country music and the idea of teaching English via country songs.

#### **Why do people like country music?**

Jo Walker-Meador: "If your mind is open to all types of music then anybody could like country music. They might not like all of it, but they can certainly like and appreciate some of it, because there is so much talent. And I think that a lot of people have never given it a chance. Some people happen to take to it certainly more quickly than others but I like it because there's variety of music. Generally speaking the artists are approachable, they show more concern for their fans. But the songwriters, the songs, most of them tell a story and I like that. I wanna understand. I don't like a song if I can't understand what it's about. I enjoy classical music, I listen to it even though there's no vocals to it, but I think you can appreciate any kind of music. It's just different people and I think the more knowledge you have of the music the more you can enjoy it."

#### **How would you define the characteristics of country music?**

Jo Walker-Meador: "I would say it's more down home, more warm fuzzy feeling. A lot of people feel they know the artist personally and I suppose that's true."

**What are the themes of country songs?**

Jo Walker-Meador: "The themes about love, lack of love, drinkin' but I don't think there's that many songs about drinkin' today as in earlier years. They're just about what happens in life. They're down-to-earth, it's how we live, people can relate to these songs because it's about life. There's a lot of different types of country songs, but I think it's all how we live and we can relate to many of the songs."

**Do you think that people can learn the English language from country songs?**

Jo Walker-Meador: "Yes, that's very true. Several years ago the Voice of America, which is a radio show that's heard all around the world, ran a contest for people to write essays 'why I like country music' and the person who won was from China. The prize was to come to Nashville at the Fan Fair and this young student from Shanghai won and his professor came with him, it was for two people, and he told us that's how they learn English, listening to country music songs."

## APPENDIX 3.1

### **DIPLOMA THESIS PROJECT #1**

#### **Teaching GRAMMAR via country songs**

Goal: Practising present tenses  
Level: Pre-Intermediate  
Timing: 20-25 min  
Song used: "I Can Still Feel You" by Collin Raye

---

#### **LESSON PLAN**

- 1) The teacher distributes the handouts.
- 2) Students listen to the song and complete missing verbs either in the Present Simple or Present Continuous form.
- 3) The teacher plays the song twice, then checks the answers.
- 4) Follow-up: Students choose 5 verbs from the lyrics and make up 5 sentences in the negative form.
- 5) The teacher asks 2-3 students to read their sentences.

*(originally carried out with 9.C at ZS Liberecka, Jablonec nad Nisou, September 20, 2007)*

## APPENDIX 3.2

### I Can Still Feel You

(performed by Collin Raye, written by T. Hyler & K. Tribble)

It's that feeling that someone is standing behind me  
And I turn around and there's no one there  
And it's the sensation  
That someone just whispered  
Yeah and I still hear your voice but you're not really here  
Your memory is like a ghost  
And my heart is its host

I can still feel you just as close as skin  
Every now and then  
All by myself, in a crowded room, or my empty bed  
There's a place you've touched  
With your love no one gets close to  
I can still feel you, I can still feel you  
I can still feel you, I can still feel you

You said you'd love me forever  
Then you said it's over  
And left me without the missing link  
I thought I'd forget you  
But I guess I forgot to  
And lately I've been too confused to think  
When I reach for someone new  
It's like I 'm touching you

I can still feel you just as close as skin  
Every now and then  
All by myself, in a crowded room, or my empty bed  
There's a place you've touched  
With your love no one gets close to  
I can still feel you, I can still feel you  
I can still feel you, I can still feel you

In everything that moves  
In everything I do

(REPEAT CHORUS)

## APPENDIX 4.1

### DIPLOMA THESIS PROJECT #2

#### Teaching VOCABULARY via country songs

Goal: Teaching and memorising new words in a creative way  
Level: Elementary  
Timing: 45 min  
Song used: "Hearts Are When You Want To Love Someone" by Collin Raye

---

#### LESSON PLAN

##### 1) Setting the topic

The teacher asks the class:

- *Who are you favorite singers/bands?*
- *How often do you listen to music?*
- *Where do you listen to music?*
- *Do you listen to the radio?*
- *Do you like dancing to music?*

##### 2) Pre-teaching vocabulary

- climb, dig, hug, put up with, tell on, fold

The teacher gestures first, then translates in L1.

Students write all new words in their mini-dictionaries.

- 3) Students listen to the song and complete missing nouns. The teacher plays the song twice, then checks the answers with the class.
- 4) The teacher translates the song with the class to make sure everybody understands all phrases.
- 5) Acting out the song
  - a) The teacher goes through the song and asks students to suggest various ideas of gesturing each single line of the song .  
*(i.e. climbing trees, digging holes, hugging dogs, folding hands, etc.)*
  - b) The teacher plays the song again and gestures all lines of the song with the class.
  - c) The song is played again and two students are invited to act it out in front of the class.

*(originally carried out with 6.A at ZS Liberecka, Jablonec nad Nisou, September 26, 2007)*

## APPENDIX 4.2

### Hearts Are For When You Want to Love Someone

(performed by Collin Raye, written by K. L. Gordon & L. Paxton)

Trees are for climbing  
And holes are for digging in  
And friends are for when you're having fun  
And hearts are for when you want to love someone

Dogs are for hugging  
And cats are for putting up with  
Birds are just for looking at  
And heads are for when you have to wear a hat

Dads are for being with  
And doing things and helping mama  
And Moms are for talking to  
And telling things you can't tell anyone

Ears are for hearing your father call  
And eyes are for seeing when it's dark  
Legs are for when you have to run  
And hearts are for when you want to love someone

Brothers always take your things  
And they break your things  
And eat your candy  
And sisters always tell on you  
And they cry a lot  
When they got no reason to

Feet are for putting your shoes on  
And hair is for looking nice in school  
And hands are for folding when your book is done  
And hearts are for when you want to love someone

## APPENDIX 5.1

### DIPLOMA THESIS PROJECT #3

#### TOPIC-BASED lessons via country songs

Topic: Jobs and Career  
Goal: Learning new words (associated with jobs), discussing future careers  
Level: Pre-Intermediate  
Timing: 45 min  
Song used: "Forty Hour Week" by Alabama

---

#### LESSON PLAN

- 1) The teacher asks about any words which are associated with working and jobs. He/she writes all words on the board, but accepts only general words (i.e. working hours, money, pay, labor, overtime, making a living, forty hour week). Any specific jobs or places are avoided at this stage.
- 2) Pre-teaching vocabulary
  - fame, fortune, strive, wheat, coal miner, rig, load

The teacher translates into L1, the words may be written on the board.

- 3) The teacher plays the song and students complete missing words in gaps. The song is played twice and then the answers are checked.



- 4) The teacher asks students how many jobs they are able to recognize in the lyrics. He/she writes the words on the board.

*(auto worker, steelworker, carpenter, shop assistant, fireman, postman, farmer, miner, rig worker, warehouseman, waitress, mechanic, policeman)*

- 5) Follow-up discussion.

The teacher asks students about the songs, their ideas and future careers.

- *Which jobs are hard and which are easy to do?*
- *Which jobs are low-paid and which are well-paid?*
- *What do these jobs have in common?*
- *Would you like to do any of these jobs?*
- *What is your idea about your future career?*

*(originally carried out with 9.C at ZS Liberecká, Jablonec nad Nisou, September 26, 2007)*

## APPENDIX 5.2

### Forty Hour Week

(performed by Alabama, written by D. Loggins, L. Silver & D. Schlitz)

There are people in this country who work hard every day  
Not for fame or fortune do they strive  
But the fruits of their labor are worth more than their pay  
And it's time a few of them were recognized

Hello Detroit auto worker, let me thank you for your time  
You work a forty hour week for a livin', just to send it on down the line  
Hello Pittsburgh steel mill workers, let me thank you for your time  
You work a forty hour week for a livin', just to send it on down the line

This is for the one who swings the hammer, driving home the nail  
Or the one behind the counter, ringing up the sale  
Or the one who fights the fires, the one who brings the mail  
For everyone who works behind the scenes

You can see them every morning in the factories and the fields  
In the city streets and the quiet country towns  
Working together like spokes inside a wheel  
They keep this country turning around

Hello Kansas wheat field farmer, let me thank you for your time  
You work a forty hour week for a livin', just to send it on down the line  
Hello West Virginia coal miner, let me thank you for your time  
You work a forty hour week for a livin', just to send it on down the line

This is for the one who drives the big rig, up and down the road  
Or the one out in the warehouse, bringing in the load  
Or the waitress, the mechanic, the policeman on patrol  
For everyone who works behind the scenes

With a spirit you can't replace with no machine  
Hello America let me thank you for your time

## APPENDIX 6.1

### DIPLOMA THESIS PROJECT #4

#### Teaching HISTORY via country songs

Goal: Presenting the Baby Boom in the USA in the mid 40's  
Level: Pre-Intermediate  
Timing: 45 min  
Song used: "Kids of the Baby Boom" by the Bellamy Brothers

---

#### LESSON PLAN

1) Lead-in: The teacher elicits questions about the World War II

- When did it take place? (require exact dates)
- In what parts of the world did it take place?
- Who won and who lost?
- Who gained most

The teacher helps students answer and then tells them about American soldiers coming home after the war.

2) Explanation of the term – the Baby Boom

- children born 1946-1964 in the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada
- greatest increase in 1946 and 1947
- 1960's – hippies, proud teenagers living in luxury (pocket money)

- famous baby boomers: Bill Clinton (1946), George W. Bush (1946), Sylvester Stallone (1946), Steven Spielberg (1946), David Bowie (1947), Elton John (1947), Carlos Santana (1947)
- 3) The teacher plays the song "Kids of the Baby Boom" for students to illustrate the lifestyle of the baby bommers. Students complete missing words in the text. The song is played twice and then the teacher checks the answers.
  - 4) Vocabulary check: freedom, abuse, capsule, taker, doom
  - 5) Explanation of certain phrases: "nation full of takers", "land of milk and honey"
  - 6) Follow-up discussion:
    - Would you like to live in this period in the USA?
    - Would you like to live in the USA now?
    - Would you like to visit the USA?
    - What places in the USA do you know?
    - What places in the USA would you like to visit?
    - Would you like to work in the USA?

*(originally carried out with 9.C at ZS Liberecka, Jablonec nad Nisou, September 27, 2007)*

## APPENDIX 6.2

### Kids of the Baby Boom

(performed by the Bellamy Brothers, written by D. Bellamy)

Our daddies won the war and came home to our moms  
They gave them so much love that all us kids were born  
We all grew up on Mickey Mouse and hula-hoops  
Then we all bought BMW's and brand new pickup trucks  
And we watched John Kennedy die one afternoon  
Kids of the baby boom

It was a time of new prosperity in the USA  
All the fortunate offsprings never had to pay  
We had sympathy for the devil and the Rolling Stones  
Then we got a little older, we found Haggard and Jones  
A generation screaming for more room  
Kids of the baby boom

Kids of the baby boom, we had freedom, we had money  
Baby boom, here in the land of milk and honey  
Counting our chickens way too soon  
Kids of the baby boom

Now we all can run computers and we all can dance  
We all have Calvin Klein written on our underpants  
And at six-o'clock, like robots, we turn on the news  
Watch those third world countries deal out more abuse  
Remember the first man on the moon  
Kids of the baby boom

REPEAT CHORUS

As our lives become a capsule they send to the stars  
And our children look at us like we came from Mars  
As the farms disappear and the sky turns black  
We're a nation full of takers, never giving back  
We never stop to think what we consume  
Kids of the baby boom

REPEAT CHORUS

Our optimism mingles with the doom  
Kids of the baby boom

## APPENDIX 7.1

### **DIPLOMA THESIS PROJECT #5**

#### **Teaching WRITING via country songs**

Goal: Improving listening and writing skills  
Level: Pre-Intermediate  
Timing: 20-25 min  
Song used: "Hearts Are When You Want To Love Someone" by Collin Raye

---

#### **LESSON PLAN**

- 1) Students take a blank sheet of paper and a pen
- 2) The teacher tells students that they are about to rewrite a song as they listen to it. The song is played for the first time as a whole for students to see whether they can understand the words.
- 3) The teacher plays the song in short parts, giving students enough time to rewrite the text. Some difficult parts may be rewinded and repeated if necessary.
- 4) When students are done, the song is played one more time for them to check.
- 5) Students read the lyrics back to the teacher.

- 6) Follow up: The teacher asks students about their experience of understanding songs and movies.

*(originally carried out with 9.C at ZS Liberecka, Jablonec nad Nisou, October 3, 2007)*

**Since the featured song was already used in Project #2, I do not attach the second copy of the song. The lyric can be found in Appendix 4.2.**

## APPENDIX 8.1

### DIPLOMA THESIS PROJECT #6

#### Teaching WRITING via country songs

Goal: Improving short-term memory, speaking skills and writing skills  
Level: Pre-Intermediate  
Timing: 20-25 min  
Song used: "www.memory" by Alan Jackson

---

#### LESSON PLAN

Preparation: Place two or three copies of the song lyrics around the classroom

- 1) Students work in pairs.
- 2) The teacher tells students rules of the competition they are about to play:
  - one student sits at the desk and writes
  - the other student reads a few lines of the lyrics, gets back to his/her partner and tells him/her the part of the song
  - the first student writes it down
  - the other one reads another part of the lyrics and tells the partner until he/she writes down the complete songs
  - students change their roles in the middle of the lyrics
  - the first pair who completes the song wins



- 3) When the first pair announces completion, the teacher gives two more minutes for the others to finish.
- 4) The song is played to check the correctness of the text.

*(originally carried out with 9.C at ZS Liberecka, Jablonec nad Nisou, October 4, 2007)*

## APPENDIX 8.2

### **www.memory**

(performed and written by Alan Jackson)

I know you're leaving, I see the signs  
You're gonna walk out on this heart of mine  
You'll never call me, you'll never write  
You made your mind up, you're gone tonight  
If some rainy day you're all alone  
You feel like talkin' you can log me on

At www.memory  
I'll be waitin' for you patiently  
If you feel the need, just click on me  
At www.memory

You won't even have to hold me or  
Look into my eyes  
You can tell me you love me  
Through your keyboard and wires  
No, you won't have to touch me or  
Even take my hand  
Just slide your little mouse around  
Until you see it land

At www.memory  
I'll be waitin' for you patiently  
If you feel the need, just click on me  
At www.memory

If you feel like love, just click on me  
At www.memory

## APPENDIX 9.1

### Celebrity

(performed & written by Brad Paisley)

Someday I'm gonna be famous  
Do I have talent, well, no  
These days you don't really need it  
Thanks to reality shows

Can't wait to date a supermodel  
Can't wait to sue my dad  
Can't wait to wreck a Ferrari  
On my way to rehab

Cause when you're a celebrity  
It's adios reality  
You can act just like a fool  
People think you're cool  
Just cause your on TV  
I can throw major fits  
When my latte isn't just how I like it  
They say I've gone insane,  
I'll blame it on the fame,  
And the pressures that it goes with  
Being a celebrity

I get to cry to Barbara Walters  
When things don't go my way  
I'll get community service  
No matter which law I break

I'll make the supermarket tabloids  
They'll write some awful stuff  
But the more they run my name down  
The more my price goes up

Cause when you're a celebrity  
It's adios reality  
No matter what you do  
People think you're cool  
Just cause you're on TV  
I can fall in and out of love

Have marriages that barely last a month  
When they go down the drain  
I'll blame it on fame  
And say it's just so tough  
Being a celebrity

So let's hitch up the wagons and head out west  
To the land of fun in the sun  
We'll be real world bachelors  
Jackass Millionaires  
Hey, hey, Hollywood  
Here we come!

Yeah, when you're a celebrity  
It's adios reality  
No matter what you do  
People think you're cool  
Just cause you're on TV  
Being a celebrity  
Yeah, celebrity  
Uh-huh

## APPENDIX 9.2

### Harder Cards

(performed by Collin Raye, written by C. Wiseman & M. Henderson)

Well the hammer fell down on a .44 primer  
Now there's one less problem in South Carolina tonight  
Wrong or right  
She just looked at me as she finished her tale  
And her blank expression went another shade paler grey  
There was nothing to say

In the shadows of her face I saw the scars  
That you get where you live where love is hard  
And she said

Don't you sit and judge me  
From some high and mighty seat  
Don't you shrug it off until  
You've walked a mile in my bare feet  
Cause there are people that you pass by everyday  
With harder cards than yours in life to play

Well I put the cuffs on her and I put her in the car  
Walked inside and he was on the floor stone dead  
Shot in the head  
There was whiskey bottles and dope by his chair  
And a starving baby with nothing to wear but tears  
You know the picture was clear

He had finally pushed her farther than the line  
And the badge I wore had lost all of its shine  
And she said

Don't you sit and judge me  
From some high and mighty seat  
Don't you shrug it off until  
You've walked a mile in my bare feet  
Cause there are people that you pass by everyday  
With harder cards than yours in life to play

Well I stood there thinking how justice was blind

But I didn't see any and I could see just fine  
And I made up my mind  
So I took the cuffs off her and I took her back in  
Wiped off the gun and I wrapped it in his right hand  
Where it should have been

And in the morning paper told in black and white  
Just another senseless case of suicide  
Oh, just a suicide  
Oh but

Don't you sit and judge me  
From some high and mighty seat  
Don't you shrug it off until  
You've walked a mile along my beat  
Cause there are people that you pass by everyday  
With harder cards than yours in life to play

Yeah a hammer fell down a .44 primer  
Now there's one less problem in South Carolina tonight

## APPENDIX 9.3

### How Do You Like Me Now

(performed by Toby Keith, written by T. Keith & C. Cannon)

I was always the crazy one  
I broke into the stadium  
And I wrote your number on the 50 yard line  
You were always the perfect one  
And the valadictorian so  
Under your number I wrote "call for a good time"

I only wanted to catch your attention  
But you overlooked me somehow  
Besides you had too many boyfriends to mention  
And I played my guitar too loud.

How do you like me now?  
How do you like me now,  
Now that I'm on my way?  
Do you still think I'm crazy  
Standin here today?  
I couldnt make you love me  
But I always dreamed about living in your radio  
How do you like me now?

When I took off to Tennessee  
I heard that you made fun of me  
Never imagined I'd make it this far  
Then you married into money girl  
Aint it a cruel and funny world?  
He took your dreams and tore them apart.

He never comes home  
And youre always alone  
And your kids hear you cryin down the hall  
Alarm clock starts ringin  
Who could that be singin  
Its me baby, with your wake up call!

REPEAT CHORUS

Tell me baby...  
I will preach on...

## APPENDIX 9.4

### How Do You Milk a Cow?

(performed by Cledus T. Judd, written by C. T. Judd & C. Clark)

I was always a lazy one, a Southern Californian  
But I've some kinfolk on the Mason-Dixson line  
So this summer just for fun hopped in my Delorian  
And headed for my uncle's farm for a short time  
I thought that I would be hunting and fishing  
I misunderstood him sumhow  
So far there's nothin but chores here to mention  
I'm bedding and feeding the sows

How do you milk a cow?  
How do you milk a cow?  
How do you milk a cow?  
I wasn't in FFA  
This cow must think I'm crazy up under it this way  
I'm sittin here a pullin but there ain't nothin coming out  
Oh-me-i-ee-i-o  
How do you milk a cow?

I love it here in Tennesse  
But these farmers all make fun of me  
Can't haul much hay in a tiny sports car  
So I got myself a four wheel drive Learned to spotlight deer at night  
And I've got sheer-shootin right down to an art  
One things for sure I hate shovelin manure  
It gets all over my overall  
Them horses need shoein I hear Bessy mooin so I thought maybe I'd ask you  
all

How do you milk a cow?  
How do you milk a cow?  
How do you milk a cow?  
I think its safe to say I may get arrested for this in L.A.  
This hiefer must empty cause she ain't puttin out  
Oh-me-i-ee-i-o  
How do you milk a cow?

How do you milk a cow?  
I no longer care I'm gettin sick and tired of smellin DAIRY AIR  
Heading back to Cali and turnin in my plow  
Oh-me-i-ee-i-o  
How do you milk a cow?



## APPENDIX 9.5

### Lookin' for Love

(performed by Sawyer Brown, written by W. Mallette, P. Ryan & B. Morrison)

Well, I spent a lifetime lookin' for you  
Single's bars and good time lovers are never true  
Playin' a fool's game and hopin' to win  
Tellin' those sweet lies and losin' again

I was lookin' for love in all the wrong places  
Lookin' for love in too many faces  
Searchin' their eyes and lookin' for traces  
Of what I'm dreamin' of  
Hopin' to find a friend and a lover  
God bless the day I discover  
Another heart lookin' for love

I was so lonely with no love in sight  
And I did everything I could to get me through the night  
Don't know where it started or where it might end  
I turned to a stranger just like a friend

I was lookin' for love in all the wrong places  
Lookin' for love in too many faces  
Searchin' their eyes and lookin' for traces  
Of what I'm dreamin' of  
Hopin' to find a friend and a lover  
God bless the day I discover  
Another heart lookin' for love

You came a knockin' at my heart's door  
You're everything I've been lookin' for

No more lookin' for love in all the wrong places  
Lookin' for love in too many faces  
Searchin' their eyes and lookin' for traces  
Of what I'm dreamin' of  
Now that I found a friend and a lover  
God bless the day I discover  
You oh you, lookin' for love

Lookin' for love in all the wrong places  
Lookin' for love in too many faces  
Searchin' their eyes and lookin' for traces  
Of what I'm dreamin' of  
Now that I found a friend and a lover  
God bless the day I discover  
You oh you, lookin' for love

## APPENDIX 9.6

### Roll On (Eighteen Wheeler)

(performed by Alabama, written by D. Loggins)

Roll on highway, roll on along  
Roll on daddy till you get back home  
Roll on family, roll on crew  
Roll on momma like I asked you to do  
And roll on eighteen-wheeler roll on (roll on)

Well it's Monday morning, he's kissin' momma goodbye  
He's up and gone with the sun  
Daddy drives an eighteen-wheeler  
And he's off on a midwest run  
As three sad faces gather 'round momma  
They ask her when daddy's comin' home  
Daddy drives an eighteen-wheeler  
And they sure miss him when he's gone (yeah they do)

Ah, but he calls them every night and he tells them that he loves them  
He taught them this song to sing

#### REPEAT CHORUS

Well it's Wednesday evening, momma's waitin' by the phone  
It rings but it's not his voice  
Seems the highway patrol has found a jack-knifed rig  
In a snow bank in Illinois

But the driver was missin' and the search had been abandoned  
For the weather had everything stalled  
And they had checked all the houses and the local motels  
When they had some more news they'd call  
And she told them when they found him to tell him that she loved him

And she hung up the phone singin'

REPEAT CHORUS

Momma and the children will be waiting up all night long  
Thinkin' nothing but the worst is comin'  
With the ringin' of the telephone  
Oh, but the man upstairs was listening  
When momma asked him to bring daddy home  
And when the call came in it was daddy on the other end  
Askin' her if she had been singin' the song, singin'

REPEAT CHORUS TWICE

Eighteen-wheeler  
Eighteen-wheeler  
Eighteen-wheeler  
Eighteen-wheeler  
Roll on  
Roll on  
Roll on  
Roll on

## APPENDIX 9.7

### The Christmas Song

(performed by Joe Diffie, written by M. Torme & R. Wells)

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire  
Jack Frost nipping at your nose  
Yuletide carols being sung by a choir  
And folks dressed up like Eskimos

Everybody knows a turkey and some  
Mistletoe help to make the season bright  
Tiny tots with their eyes all aglow  
Will find it hard to sleep tonight

They know that Santa's on his way  
He's loaded lots of toys and goodies on his sleigh  
And every mother's child is gonna spy  
To see if reindeer really know how to fly

And so I'm offering this simple phrase  
To kids from one to ninety-two  
Although it's been said many times, many ways  
Merry Christmas to you

They know that Santa's on his way  
He's loaded lots of toys and goodies on his sleigh  
And every mother's child is gonna spy  
To see if reindeer really know how to fly

And so I'm offering this simple phrase  
To kids from one to ninety-two  
Although it's been said many times, many ways  
Merry Christmas  
Merry Christmas  
Merry Christmas to you

## APPENDIX 9.8

### The Talkin' Song Repair Blues

(performed by Alan Jackson, written by D. Linde)

The mechanic raised up from under my hood  
He shook his head and said, "This ain't good  
Your timin' belt's done shrunk one size too small  
Those spark plug wires are a little too long  
And your main prodponder's nearly gone  
Your injector ports are stripped and that ain't all"

"The torque converter's runnin' low on torque  
And that water pump's nearly down a quart  
But we caught it all in time so you're in luck"  
He said, "I've got the time and I've got the parts  
Just give me the word and I'm ready to start  
I think we can bring her in for eight hundred bucks"

But don't be downhearted, I can fix it for you, sonny  
It won't take too long, it'll just take money

Then he said, "Ain't you that songwriter guy"  
I said, "Yes I am," he said, "So am I"  
And he sat down and played me a song by the grease rack  
When he finished singin' he gave me a smile  
And I closed my eyes and pondered awhile  
And he said, "What do you think  
Now don't hold nothin' back"

Well, I gave him my most sorrowful look  
And I said, "This song's got a broken hook  
I can order you a new one from Nashville but it won't be cheap  
And I know you've been using a cut-rate thesaurus  
'Cause your adverbs have backed up into your chorus  
Now your verse is runnin' on verbs that are way too weak"

But don't be downhearted, I can fix it for you, sonny  
It won't take too long, it'll just take money

And I said, "Hold on friend now I'm not through  
I hate to be the one to give you the news  
But your whole melodic structures worked itself loose  
It's got so many dotted eighth notes in it  
I'd keep her under fifty beats per minute  
I mean, that's just me talkin', it's really up to you"\*

"And you've got a bad safety problem with  
That dominant chord with the augmented fifth  
Just see how dangerously high it raises you up  
So just go on over there and work on my car  
I'll sit here by the fan and chances are  
I can straighten this thing out for  
eigh... nine hundred bucks"

But don't be downhearted, I can fix it for you, sonny  
It won't take too long  
You guessed it  
It may be a hit  
I like it

## APPENDIX 9.9

### Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning)

(performed & written by Alan Jackson)

Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day  
Out in the yard with your wife and children  
Working on some stage in LA  
Did you stand there in shock at the site of  
That black smoke rising against that blue sky  
Did you shout out in anger  
In fear for your neighbor  
Or did you just sit down and cry

Did you weep for the children  
Who lost their dear loved ones  
And pray for the ones who don't know  
Did you rejoice for the people who walked from the rubble  
And sob for the ones left below

Did you burst out in pride  
For the red white and blue  
The heroes who died just doing what they do  
Did you look up to heaven for some kind of answer  
And look at yourself to what really matters

I'm just a singer of simple songs  
I'm not a real political man  
I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you  
The difference in Iraq and Iran  
But I know Jesus and I talk to God  
And I remember this from when I was young  
Faith hope and love are some good things he gave us  
And the greatest is love

Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day  
Teaching a class full of innocent children  
Driving down some cold interstate  
Did you feel guilty cause you're a survivor  
In a crowded room did you feel alone



Did you call up your mother and tell her you love her  
Did you dust off that bible at home

Did you open your eyes and hope it never happened  
Close your eyes and not go to sleep  
Did you notice the sunset the first time in ages  
Speak with some stranger on the street  
Did you lay down at night and think of tomorrow  
Go out and buy you a gun  
Did you turn off that violent old movie you're watching  
And turn on "I Love Lucy" reruns  
Did you go to a church and hold hands with some stranger  
Stand in line and give your own blood  
Did you just stay home and cling tight to your family  
Thank God you had somebody to love

I'm just a singer of simple songs  
I'm not a real political man  
I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you  
The difference in Iraq and Iran  
But I know Jesus and I talk to God  
And I remember this from when I was young  
Faith hope and love are some good things he gave us  
And the greatest is love

I'm just a singer of simple songs  
I'm not a real political man  
I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you  
The difference in Iraq and Iran  
But I know Jesus and I talk to God  
And I remember this from when I was young  
Faith hope and love are some good things he gave us  
And the greatest is love

The greatest is love  
The greatest is love

Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day

## APPENDIX 10.1

### Song Assessment Sheet

Think about or discuss the questions and assess the song or game by giving it an overall rating for each section.

#### Are the children involved?

- 1 Would the children enjoy the song/game outside the classroom?
- 2 Can all the children feel involved?
- 3 Can those who are weak at English take part without feeling frustrated?
- 4 Is the song/game clear to understand and use?
- 5 Does the song/game keep the children's interest until the end?
- 6 Does the song have a good melody?/Is the game visually stimulating?

Uninvolved 

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
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 Involved

#### Is language development integrated into the song/game?

- 1 Can the language content be controlled and focused?
- 2 Do the children practice English all the time?
- 3 Do they feel challenged by the English?
- 4 Can new vocabulary be introduced into the song/game?
- 5 Can new (achievable) structures be introduced into the song/game?
- 6 Can new language be linked with old language during the song/game?

Language doesn't develop 

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
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 Language develops

#### Does it encourage active learning?

- 1 How much initiative do the children have?
- 2 To what extent does the teacher have to explain or demonstrate?
- 3 How much does the teacher have to do during the song/game?
- 4 Could the children do any of this?
- 5 Do the children have opportunities to ask questions?
- 6 Is new language discovered by the children?

Passive 

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
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 Active

**Copied from "Songs and Games for Children" by David Paul**

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## APPENDIX 10.2

### Recommended Thematic Songs for Classroom Use

#### SCHOOL

"Check Yes Or No" - George Strait  
"Tougher Than Nails" - Joe Diffie  
"High School Heart " - John Michael Montgomery  
"Bobbie Ann Mason" - Rick Trevino  
"I'm in Love with Capital U" - Joe Diffie

#### BOYS AND GIRLS

"Strawberry Wine" - Deana Carter  
"She's in Love with the Boy" - Trisha Yearwood  
"Little Sister" - Dwight Yoakam  
"You're Gonna Miss This" - Trace Adkins  
"She Likes It Too" - Alan Jackson  
"Cleaning This Gun (Come on in Boy)" - Rodney Atkins

#### FAMILY

"Home" - Alan Jackson  
"Drive (For Daddy Gene)" - Alan Jackson  
"She Was" - Mark Chesnutt  
"Small Town Southern Man" - Alan Jackson  
"Love Without End, Amen" - George Strait  
"Remember When" - Alan Jackson  
"Watching You" - Rodney Atkins

#### SPORT

"Swing" - Trace Adkins  
"She's All That" - Collin Raye  
"Make It Look Easy" - Steve Wariner  
"The Nebraska Song" - Sawyer Brown

#### WORK

"Forty Hour Week" - Alabama  
"Chain of Love" - Clay Walker  
"Is There Life Out There" - Reba McEntire  
"Beautiful Mess" - Diamond Rio

#### NATURE

"Mountain Music" - Alabama

"Paradise" - John Priner  
" The River" - Garth Brooks  
"My Redneck of the Woods" - Joe Diffie

#### **HEALTH AND DOCTORS**

"Love's Got a Hold on You" - Alan Jackson  
"Standing Outside The Fire" - Garth Brooks  
"Braid My Hair" - Randy Owen  
"Give Me One More Shot" - Alabama

#### **ANIMALS**

"Me and Elephant" - George Hamilton IV  
"Friendly Beasts" - Garth Brooks  
"Hearts Are When You Want to Love Someone" - Collin Raye

#### **TOYS**

"Pickup Man" - Joe Diffie  
"Where's the Playground, Bobby" - Lynn Anderson  
"Hot Rot Sleigh " - Toby Keith

#### **TECHNOLOGY**

"I Still Like Bologna" - Alan Jackson  
"www.memory" - Alan Jackson  
"Online" - Brad Paisley

#### **OLD PEOPLE**

"What Might Have Been" - Little Texas  
"Old Hippie" - Bellamy Brothers  
"Yesterday's Wine" - George Jones  
"Farewell Party" - Gene Watson  
"Would You Go With Me" - Josh Turner  
"Choices" - George Jones